H. G. WELLS

PERSONALITY CHARACTER TOPOGRAPHY

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By

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"THOMAS HARDY'S DORSET"
"KIPLING'S SUSSEX" ETC.

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PREFACE

THE present volume has, I am fully aware, no claim to be considered a complete study of all the writings of H. G. Wells, for the production of such a volume would demand far more time, detail, and learning than have been at my disposal. My object has simply been to present a portrait of Mr. H. G. Wells (it is because he is a man of such immense importance and not for want of courtesy that I have dropped the "Mr." throughout the book), and to present some of the main points of interest in his life and work in a form that will appeal to the "man in the street" who, like myself, may lay no claim to any specialised knowledge of the author, but who nevertheless is desirous of knowing something about a writer who looms so big and ubiquitous in the present day world of letters.

Such success as I may have achieved in this direction is due in no small measure to the kind assistance and advice which I have received from almost all whose help I have sought in collecting information for the following pages.

Mr. Geoffrey H. Wells has devoted an abundance of time and trouble to assisting

me, especially in connection with the chapter "Early Struggles," and my indebtedness to him is such as to call for the most unreserved acknowledgment. I must also thank Mr. Wells himself for his courtesy in kindly replying to some of my queries.

I wish to specially mention the invaluable information gathered from the biographical and critical article on Wells by Thomas Seccombe in *The Bookman* (April, 1914); also "The Gay Defiance of H. G. Wells," by E. T. Raymond; "The Novelist as Prophet" (*Cassell's Saturday Journal*, April 26th, 1899); "If Sanity Returned" (C. F. G. Masterman, *Daily News*, September 14th, 1906); "H. G. Wells" (Francis Gribble), *Everyman*, June 19th, 1914; "Wells in Washington," *New York Times*, March 12th, 1922; "Utopia and a Comet," *Daily Chronicle* (Hubert Bland), September 14th, 1906; Ralph D. Blumenfeld's "London Letter" in New York *Town and Country*, February, 1921; "H. G. Wells and Julius Cæsar," *John O' London's Weekly*, May 29th, 1920; "Passionate Friends," by Ford Madox Hueffer, *Outlook*, September 27th, 1913; "Wells on Marriage," by Rebecca West, *Everyman*, November 8th, 1912; Richard Curl on Wells, *Everyman*, December 20th, 1912; G. B. Burgin's sketch of Wells in *The Weekly Sun*, June 3rd, 1899; "The War and Socialism," by H. G. Wells (Clarion Press); "Will Socialism Destroy the

Home ? " by H. G. Wells (Independent Labour Party Pamphlet); " A Reasonable Man's Peace," by Wells (*Daily News* Pamphlet, 1917); " Letters of Henry James," Macmillan, 1920; " The Airship as a Destroyer," by Oakley Williams, *Pall Mall Magazine*, January, 1908.

I have also been constantly guided by Mr. J. D. Beresford's scholarly essay on H. G. Wells published by Nisbet and Co., 1915, Mr. Sidney Dark's " Outline of Wells " (Parsons), and Mr. Holbrook Jackson's study of Wells in his charming essays " Romance and Reality " (Grant Richards, 1911). I wish also to acknowledge the appropriation of a word coined by Mr. Jackson—Peterpantheism—and used as a heading for one of my chapters. To Mr. William Archer's searching analysis of Wells's New Religion in " God and Mr. Wells " (Watts and Co.), my thanks are due for the pleasure and suggestions I have drawn from it. Nor must I forget to thank Doctor John P. Atkinson and Rev. G. Montagu Benton, of Saffron Walden, for their assistance in the topographical notes, and Mr. E. Walter Jones for help in reference to Chapter X.

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CHAPTER I

Preliminary Survey

Confucius said, "Every truth has four corners; as a teacher I give you one corner and it is for you to find the other three." The true artist in words or things is always more or less impressionistic—he talks in parables and it is for the reader to puzzle out the meaning for himself. This maxim of Confucius has an agreeable twist in it, and I find none better as an "Open Sesame" to the works of H. G. Wells. In a word Wells demands the mind of the seeker—deep sympathy and diligence—and unless the reader can give that, in full measure, he will never find the true charm of his work. Not the story but the thought behind the story is "the thing" with this writer. However, he always leaves a splendid trail of clues for his readers to pick up, for from page to page, he will often rub a thought in, and leave the story to go on telling its tale for those dear old souls who subscribe to Mudie's Library and ask for something popular with a strong love interest in it.

The capsules of thought which are contained in Wells's novels are not always profound in

the philosophic sense, and we, his readers, are grateful for it. He is easy to follow, and is a man who regards life just in the same way as a million of his neighbours. But he has the great art that is lacking in the rest of us—the art of turning the vision of the dreamer into portable wisdom—short, sharp, spear thrusts which we all can remember, or better still, which we cannot forget. He is always original, interesting and stimulating. On every page he challenges the intellectual progress of his readers.

Wells is a great fighter, too; and moreover he possesses the noble and somewhat rare gift of enthusiasm which is a medicine for the most diverse ills—it alleviates both the pains of poverty and the boredom of riches. Enthusiasm and health are synonymous. Enthusiasts do not go down before disease—they are more likely to get run over by a motor bus or something like that. The whole medical world now favours the theory that half our ailments gain their first hold in a morbid mentality. Love is blind, people tell us. This is of course an exaggeration. But it is built up from the tried and tested truth that enthusiasm, whether it takes the form of love or hate, postage stamps or first editions, always brings myopia in its wake. Enthusiasm ever has trouble with its eyes. That is perhaps why much of Wells's tempered cleverness and keen criticism drops

from him in unreserved and exultant self-surrender when he deals with his pet enthusiasm of the moment.

One enthusiasm which he loves to take out for a riotous ramp on the slightest provocation is his vision of the scientifically perfect world. There one feels as if he were on an indeterminable tour through a succession of most perfectly planned and equipped workhouses. His Utopian palaces are most depressing besides being in his own words " very clear and clean and simple." Mr. E. T. Raymond remarks that the most cheerful edifice in the Wells's Utopian city is the lethal chamber which permits an " exit from an atmosphere as cold, if not quite as healthy, as that of a well-ordered mortuary."

The very first thing which put me out of sympathy with the Wellsian palace was his outlawry of the old-fashioned open fireplace. I know of nothing so beneficent as an open fireplace. Fie on a man who talks of radiators, and thinks himself too great a philosopher to bow down to an honest log fire. May he live in a vast steam-heated hotel for a while to teach him the value of the open grate. These are the kind of dizzy notions Wells would palm off on us :

" There is no fireplace, and I am perplexed by that until I find a thermometer beside six switch-boards on the wall. Above this switch-board is a brief instruction : one switch warms

the floor, which is not carpeted, but covered by a substance like soft oilcloth; one warms the mattress (which is of metal resistance coils threaded to and fro in it); and the others warm the wall in various degrees, each directing current through a separate system of resistances. The casement does not open, but above, flush with the ceiling, a noiseless rapid fan pumps air out of the room. The air enters by a Tobin shaft. There is a recess dressing-room, equipped with a bath and all that is necessary to one's toilette, and the water, one remarks, is warmed, if one desires it warm, by passing it through an electrically heated spiral of tubing. A cake of soap drops out of a store machine on the turn of a handle, and when you have done with it, you drop that and your soiled towels and so forth, which also are given you by machines, into a little box, through the bottom of which they drop at once and sail down a smooth shaft."

I wonder if Easton Glebe is heated with such radiators! I will not believe it. Rather will I think of Wells calling his architect up before him and saying:

"Sir, I wish the fireplaces of my house to be tall, with generous open grates, ingle-nooks, oak shelves and soft coloured tiles."

Of course he must have said this, for thus he would best catch in a hundred fire-lit pictures the soul of things within his home.

As for me, I will draw my chair up to the

magical ash-wood blaze and toast my toes till I come to a fireless grave. Little friends, talk to me of drowsy log fires!

But let those who will deplore this or that weakness in his work, Wells is endowed with the normal receptive mind and has always something to say worth listening to. One very daring journalist has described him as the "Greatest living man who is not needed." But that is a piece of gentle banter. He has tremendous power and the spirit of his work is always pregnant with human-ness. Take "Anticipations," "Mankind in the Making" and "The Modern Utopia," and follow them in the spiritual meanings rather than by the printed word. The clean and simple things are there behind the passionate criticism of all our evils—and over all is the desire for comradeship, wider prospects and advantages for all, greater freedom and happier homes. The true New Republican "will seek perpetually to gauge his quality, he will watch to see himself the master of his habits and of his powers; he will take his brain, blood and lineage as a trust to be administered for the world."

* * * *

The 'nineties produced two fresh—or, shall we say modernized?—forms of romance: the romance of the day's work and the romance of the inhuman. These subjects had been meddled with by many writers in a blundering

way, but never have we been regaled with such perfect workmanship as Rudyard Kipling's and Wells's. The lure of things technical has made a distinct appeal to both authors, but in each case the subject is treated in diverse ways. Kipling puts the machine in the foreground of his picture, and makes it the really sentient figure of his tale. In his story .007, which is the record of a shining and impetuous young locomotive, we feel that the troubles of the " loco " when it first becomes acquainted with a hot-box are our troubles. It calls for ten times more fellow-feeling than any of Wells's machines. It follows that after Kipling has been writing of machines, and turns to celebrate man, we realize that his machine possesses a soul, while his human characters are mere puppets. His machines are more alive than his men and women. But it is the reverse with Wells; of all his extravagant stories of the machinery of the world not one of his mechanical creations is a creature we have met—a thing that refuses to be forgotten. His machines have no souls. Therefore we may postulate that Kipling celebrates the man-like machine while Wells celebrates the machine-like man. It is the great dream of Wells that one day all humanity will be like some vast business of cog wheels, working in perfect order and rhythm, chanting like Kipling's engine in McAndrew's Hymn the note of: LAW, ORDER, DUTY AND RESTRAINT,

Obedience, Discipline. It will be a very grim, cold, ponderous old place this World State of his, and mercy, sympathy, compassion, and love seem to be virtues—indeed they are vital forces—for which he does not appear to have any use in his great scheme. However, his point of view is the common-sense point of view, and he is all the while pointing out a possible road leading to a finer civilisation, which if still too elevated and fanciful for us, may be appreciated for its valuable suggestions with regard to certain aspects of socialism.

He has certainly changed his mind on many points since his " Anticipations " were published in 1901 (*Fortnightly Review*), but it is very interesting to compare the images of his uncanny imagination with the facts of the present day. Perhaps no writer gives us such a faithful picture of the use of air-ships in warfare and the disregard of non-combatants as Wells; and the following is an amazing forecast of the battle line in France in 1918:

" But somewhere far in the rear, the central organiser will sit at the telephonic centre of his vast front, and he will strengthen here and feed there, and watch, watch perpetually the pressure, the incessant, remorseless pressure that is seeking to wear down his countervailing thrust. Behind the thin firing line that is actually engaged, the country for many miles will be rapidly cleared and devoted to the business of war, big machines

will be at work making second, third, and fourth lines of trenches that may be needed if presently the firing line is forced back, spreading out transverse paths for the swift lateral movement of the cyclists, who will be in perpetual alertness to relieve sudden local pressures, and all along those great motor roads our first "Anticipations" sketched, there will be a vast and rapid shifting to and fro of big and very long-range guns. These guns will probably be fought with the help of balloons. The latter will hang above the firing line all along the front, incessantly ascending and withdrawn; they will be continually determining the distribution of the antagonist's forces, directing the fire of continually shifting great guns upon the apparatus and supports in the rear of his fighting line, forecasting his night plans and seeking some tactical and strategic weakness in that sinewy line of battle."

In 1901, Wells had not made up his mind concerning monogamous marriage. In "Anticipations" he thinks the strong arm of the State will insist only upon one thing—the security and welfare of the child. The State will be reserve guardian of all children. It will aim at establishing after a second century is past, a World State with a common language and a common rule. The unfit will be eliminated, and the whole tenor and meaning of the world as he sees it is that the unfit will have to go. So far as they fail to develop sound, vigorous, and distinctive

personalities for the greater world of the future it is their portion to die out and disappear. He does not think that the New Republican will have any belief in the immortality of the soul. Active and capable men of all forms of religious profession are beginning to disregard the question of immortality altogether. So, to a greater degree, will the men of the coming time.

The New State will take drastic measures with the incurably diseased and habitual criminals. A State inspector will call round with some morphia pills and gently but firmly administer them. The suicide of helpless and afflicted people will be regarded as an act of duty rather than a crime.

His first books on sociology form a sort of trilogy—" Anticipations," " Mankind in the Making " (1903) and " A Modern Utopia " (1905).

Had he been a pessimist he would have made a second George Gissing, for it will be admitted that the latter was almost as clever as Wells, but of course without Wells's striking vein of eternal energy. But there are points in the two writers which make interesting comparison. The early years of a Gissing leading character and a Wells creation such as Kipps run parallel. In both cases they are likely to be poverty-stricken, odd people, with a lively idea that their personal worth should place them far above their sordid environments. But once the battle for life and advancement begins the two writers have nothing

in common. The Gissing hero is a doomed man from the start, and every time he grasps the rung of the ladder to hoist himself up Fate comes down with a hammer on his knuckles. In the end he never expects to grasp the ladder without receiving a check of some kind and so he only contents himself with whining out his peevish protest against life's regulations, and appointing himself as a picket to prevent others from approaching the ladder. The Wells hero, though also a graduate of the "University of Hard Knocks," when time is called for the first round, is neither so melancholy nor so easily vanquished. He is indeed a very tactful young man too, in a "natural sort of way," as Wells is fond of saying. One instinctively thinks of Bert Smallways in "The War in the Air." The picture of Bert is not very flattering, but we feel at once that the young man means to get up the ladder by fair means or foul:

"Bert Smallways was a vulgar little creature, the sort of pert, limited soul that the old civilisation of the early twentieth century produced by the million in every country of the world. He had lived all his life in narrow streets, and between mean houses he could not look over, and in a narrow circle of ideas from which there was no escape. He thought the whole duty of man was to be smarter than his fellows, get his hands, as he put it, 'on the dibs,' and have a good time. He was, in fact, the sort of man who

had made England and America what they were. The luck had been against him so far, but that was by the way. He was a mere aggressive and acquisitive individual."

Wells has informed us that Bert had no code of courage. This, I think, is not altogether just, for it required a considerable amount of courage in him to face the Prince's secretary and stick it out that he was Butteridge, the world-famous inventor. Bert also proved himself to be a bold and daring mechanic, showing reckless courage many times in undertaking hazardous work on the "Vaterland" when she was disabled. Anyway, we know from the first chapter that Bert is as resilient as Wells himself, and that we are backing a winner. That is a helpful and exhilarating feeling. The jolly joust is more desirable than Gissing's sad note of dismayed and bitter regret.

Let us turn to "The Salvaging of Civilization." Wells does not weep over the ruins of war without hope. He quickly forgets all his gloomy forebodings, and is no man for standing by as a spectator. He is soon at the wheel, and is always eager to taste life, to guide it. With eager and audacious boldness he draws up a method by which a new world State must be governed :

"There will be a supreme court determining *not* International Law, but World Law. There will be a growing code of World Law.

"There will be a world currency.

"There will be a ministry of posts, transport, and communications generally.

"There will be a ministry of trade in staple products and for the conservation and development of the natural resources of the earth.

"There will be a ministry of social and labour conditions.

"There will be a ministry of world health.

"There will be a ministry, the most important ministry of all, watching and supplementing national educational work and taking up the care and stimulation of backward communities.

"And instead of a War Office and Naval and Military departments, there will be a *Peace Ministry* studying the belligerent possibilities of every new invention, watching for armed disturbances everywhere, and having complete control of every armed force that remains in the world."

Wells is not the sort of man ever to be very downhearted for long. Even in this age of pessimism when half the world seems to be in ruins he is still cheerful, alert and unsuppressible —he rebounds with the resilience of a punching ball and his rejoinders are just as full of vigour. Perhaps his nearest approach to real pessimism will be found in "The Salvaging of Civilization." Browning's optimism—"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world"—was certainly not his when he wrote :

"This world of mankind seems to me to be a

very sinister and dreadful world. It has come to this—that I open my newspaper every morning with a sinking heart, and usually I find little to console me."

* * * *

It will be observed that Wells's novels are not merely dissertations on life; they are charged with finer material than that—they pulse and throb with vitality themselves. They are full of electric currents and the God-energy of eternal boyishness. One feels that their author is acutely sensitive to surrounding conditions. More than any other writer he gives one the idea of having his hand on the steering wheel at every perilous turn of the road. He is wonderfully inquisitive—inquisitive about movements, sensations and facts. Take, for example, this passage from his novel "Mr. Britling sees it Through" which may strike the eye at a chance opening:

"Ahead of them and well to the left, rode a postman on a bicycle; towards them, with that curious effect of implacable fury peculiar to motor cycles, came a motor cyclist. First Mr. Britling thought that he would not pass between these two, then he decided that he would hurry up and do so, then he reverted to his former decision, and then it seemed to him that he was going so fast that he must inevitably run down the postman. His instinct not to do that pulled the car sharply across the path of the motor

cyclist. 'Oh my God!' cried Mr. Britling; 'My God!' twisted his wheel over and distributed his feet amon his levers dementedly.

"He had an imperfectly formed idea of getting across right in front of the motor cyclist, and then they were going down the brief grassy slope between the road and the wall, straight at the wall, and still at a good speed. The motor cyclist smacked against something and vanished from the problem. The wall seemed to rush up at them and then—collapse. There was a tremendous concussion. Mr. Direck gripped at his friend the emergency brake, but had only time to touch it before his head hit against the frame of the glass wind-screen, and a curtain fell upon everything . . . . .

"He opened his eyes upon a broken wall, a crumpled motor car, and an undamaged motor cyclist in the aviator's cap and thin oilskin overalls dear to motor cyclists."

If the reader has by any chance experienced the thrills of a motor smash he will recognize at once the "awareness" of the above passage. The motor cyclist in the inevitable oilskins and leather helmet attracts Wells at once, and I feel that he is in sympathy with such people. He is always inclined to idealise the man with a motor.

* * * *

Like most men who have struggled for bread in the towns, silence and solitude have a singular

appeal for Wells. He constantly insists that it is necessary and good for the soul for each man to go for a time into the silence and distance of some wild place for calm and deliberate reflection. It will be recalled that in " Marriage " he fell back on the device of sending Trafford and Marjorie into the loneliness of a Labrador winter, in order to set them right with themselves and give them a clearer vision of life; and the idea is worked out again in " Ann Veronica " where Capes takes Ann into the shining glories and blue shadows of the mountains of Switzerland to test their love for each other. The desire to flee from the noise of the world is as sure and profound as the impulse which drove Richard Jefferies from inland meadows to the sea, and goaded Sir Francis Drake to disappointment and death at sea in 1596. It is something which at times overpowers that delicious sense of home and friends and bids us go forth to the waste places—to exchange home for an estate that is a truer symbol of our inconstant lodging on earth. This impulse is introduced in the mystical ceremonials of the *samurai* (" A Modern Utopia "):

" But the fount of motives lies in the individual life, it lies in silent and deliberate reflections, and at this the most striking of all the rules of the *samurai* aims. For seven consecutive days in the year, at least, each man or woman under the rule must go right out of all the life of man

into some wild and solitary place, must speak to no man or woman, and have no sort of intercourse with mankind. They must go bookless and weaponless, without pen or paper or money. Provisions must be taken for the period of the journey, a rug or sleeping sack—for they must sleep under the open sky—but no means of making a fire. They may study maps beforehand to guide them, showing any difficulties and dangers in the journey, but they may not carry such helps. They must not go by beaten ways or wherever there are inhabited houses, but into the bare, quiet places of the globe—the regions set apart for them."

* * * *

Mr. E. T. Raymond has pointed out that an author who expected to make a solid income by writing was a comic notion in the days of Adam Smith and his "Wealth of Nations," and in this book the literary quilldrivers are classed as the "unprosperous race." In those days an author's calling was looked upon as a dreadful trade—like looking for gold in London gutters. But things have changed, as the fortunate financial history of Herbert George Wells certainly proves up to the hilt. The "boom" which followed his novel "Kipps" (1905) can only be compared in its area, length, duration and significance to that of a famous forerunner, Charles Dickens. But Charles Dickens was never very robust from the financial

point of view. I am not sure, but I could make a shrewd guess that Ethel M. Dell has netted a greater sum of money out of one short and simple novel than Dickens received for any three of his stories of enormous length and marvellous complexity. And yet Dickens in his day enjoyed world-wide recognition, was a popular idol and was looked upon as a man who had been well rewarded financially. His middling-sized house at Gadshill was looked upon as a sort of emperor's palace. But what is the truth about it? The freehold cost of it was under £2,000 —a sum that Miss ——, the novelist, recently spent on building a wall around her country house to protect her from the gaze of curious admirers.* Dickens was haunted by a fear of poverty—based on the expenses of a large family and a dread of illness, and this caused him to augment his income by giving those exhausting public readings which certainly hastened his death in the end. So Wells, compared with Dickens, is a very fortunate man. He can also congratulate himself he was not born a poet, for the real poets of his time were very scurvily treated. As one critic remarked, they were prophets whom England did not stone and did not even take the trouble to listen to. Davidson and Middleton, the one about fifty, the other not yet thirty, found it so very difficult to earn enough to keep body and soul together that

* *Vide* "The Gay Defiance of H. G. Wells," by E. T. Raymond.

they threw away their lives. Poor Middleton roamed London, forsaken and friendless, repeating pathetically that there was " no demand for poetry—no demand at all," and Davidson, who wrote some of the finest poems in the English language, could not sell one of them for a five-pound note. Here are two of his verses which the world received with such shabby and careless regard :

My feet are heavy now, but on I go,
  My head erect beneath the tragic years,
The way is steep, but I would have it so ;
  And dusty, but I lay the dust with tears,
Though none can see me weep : alone I climb
The rugged path that leads me out of time—
    Out of time and out of all,
    Singing yet in sun and rain,
  " Heel and toe from dawn to dusk
    Round the world and home again."

Farewell the hope that mocked, farewell despair
  That went before me still and made the pace.
The earth is full of graves, and mine was there
  Before my life began, my resting-place ;
And I shall find it out, and with the dead
Lie down forever, all my sayings said—
    Deeds all done and songs all sung,
    While others chant in sun and rain,
  " Heel and toe from dawn to dusk,
    Round the world and home again."

And while Wells was concerned with the salvation of society, pausing now and then to pulverize the business classes with his scorn—" A miscellany of shareholders, workers, financiers and superfluous poor—such are the English " ; " when I think of imperialism I think of the Union Jack stuck upon inferior goods to sell them," and so forth, poor Richard Middleton

was asking, as a favour, for a few bright moments out of all eternity :

> Time ! you old dotard prosing endlessly
> To bore a graceless world, and leave our sky
> Sadder than rain or any wise man's tears,
> I crave no part in your monotony,
> But ask one favour, being born to die,
> Grant me my moments, you may keep your years.

Let us hope that when Wells is made president of the Modern Utopia that he will honour John Davidson by giving him a place in " The Book of the Samurai " along with " Old Henley." By the way, his picture of Henley as he recollects him is quite good—" a great red-faced man, with fiery hair, a noisy, intolerant maker of enemies, with a tender heart. He wrote like wine ; red wine with a light shining through it." And it might be added that the " red wine " of his genius did not bring in the price of cheapest claret !

Yet the literary men of those days, at least those who refused to accept shelter in a world which treated them so shabbily, were decidedly optimistic. They might have groused in a mild way or murdered a publisher now and then, but few of them longed for " A Modern Utopia " or a " Wells's Lethal Chamber." With a bottle of port in the sideboard and a wife who was proficient in the art of making dumplings our cheery — sometimes beery ! — Victorian ink-slinger was moderately happy. He felt that God was in his Heaven right enough, even if the world was a little irksome at times.

But from the beginning Wells has been troubled with a hatred of the prevailing social system. His readers will gather from certain descriptions in "Kipps," and "The History of Mr. Polly" that some of the chief targets for his censure are the inadequacies of cheap education. The reader can picture that "private school of dingy aspect and still dingier pretensions, where there were no object lessons, and the studies of book-keeping and French were pursued (but never effectually overtaken) under the guidance of an elderly gentleman, who wore a nondescript gown and took snuff, wrote copperplate, explained nothing, and used a cane with remarkable dexterity and gusto."

Perhaps the snuffy gentleman who instructed young Wells was a blessing travelling incognito! If he had been a brilliant and scholarly man, he might have influenced his scholar against that keen criticism of life which has been so very useful to him. Worse still, Wells might have been the son of a millionaire pickle-merchant, and sent to Eton and other wearisome courts of learning. If he had survived such a depressing period with any acuteness of vision he would have been a marvellous fellow.

* * * *

What becomes of a man personally is of no importance to Wells. To him man is only a temporary phenomenon. It is not how to

save the individual but the salvation of society that concerns him.

He has been very ferocious at the expense of the capitalist—the "wicked able man who is a kind of sink into which much flows but out of which little ever comes except a musty whiff of charity." At one time he was very dejected over the dividends which converged from various parts of the world towards the capitalist, and was of the opinion that, unless defeated, he would have us all at the galley oars in the end. But since that time he has taken on a certain mellowness. His novels have been "boomed" and "filmed," he has been lionised, and some of these dividends have been converging his way and no man has given better value for them. He knows the satisfaction of work well done and well paid for. He appreciates the comfort and luxury of a beautiful old English home. He is now more sorry than angry regarding the captains of industry, and has come to the conclusion that such "foolish plungers" are wanting in that higher form of mental power which alone could accomplish the ruin of mankind.

Wells, like Kipling, has in late years been attracted to the stillness and ancientry of the English wayside for inspiration, and in Mr. Britling we find him playing affectionately with the idea that Essex, his adopted county, is quite unlike any other spot in the world. Essex

is the only county " where the millionaires and that sort of people " do not pollute the air and squat in the old estates. Wells is more truculent and saucy in his love for Essex than Hilaire Belloc is over his beloved Sussex Downs: " Surrey is full of rich stockbrokers, company-promoters, bookies, judges, newspaper proprietors. Sort of people who fence the path across their parks. They do something to the old places—I don't know what they do—but instantly the countryside becomes a villadom. And little sub-estates and red-brick villas and art cottages spring up. And a kind of new, hard neatness. And pneumatic tyre and automobile spirit advertisements—great glaring boards by the roadside. And all the poor people are inspected and rushed about until they forget who their grandfathers were. They become villa parasites and odd-job men, and grow basely rich and buy gramophones."

Among people whom he cannot abide are the golf-playing fraternity. He seems to hate them more than soldiers and clergymen, and treats them as a scurvy and persistent eczema which breaks out during the week-end all over Surrey and Sussex:

" Those Surrey people are not properly English at all. They are strenuous. You have to get on or get out. They drill their gardeners, lecture very fast on agricultural efficiency, and have miniature rifle ranges in every village. They

dress for dinner. They dress for everything. If a man gets up in the night to look for a burglar he puts on the correct costume—or doesn't go. They've got a special scientific system for urging on their tramps. And they lock up their churches on a week-day. Half their soil is hard chalk or a rationalistic sand, only suitable for bunkers and villa foundations. And they play golf in a large, expensive, thorough way because it's the thing to do . . . "

On the other hand, he points out there is a fourth dimension in Essex which, to an American, is beyond perception. It is a marvellous place and no " decent Essex man " wants to play golf. The soil is no common earth, but " rich succulent clay " stuff which holds and possesses the owner (in more ways than one in winter !), and all the finger-posts have been twisted round by facetious men years ago. Such things of course call forth all the traditional excellence in a man's character, and are good for the soul. In Essex they hunt in any old togs, and the farmers are inordinately proud of their rheumatics, hens, pigs, oaks, and roses—and regard them as part of a great legacy of responsibility. The dead, twelve-coffin deep, of the " six - hundred - year - old - families " are always whispering, questioning about the perfection of the pigs or the pangs of the rheumatics —and the dead are very wise and know those who are worthy and honest of intention.

This is Wells's Essex. So he sees it, and so he believes it will continue to remain.

Before I bring this chapter to an end, I feel that a word or two on the intense vein of his sincerity will be appropriate. Nobody could possibly accuse him of hypocrisy. As the Rt. Hon. C. F. G. Masterman has written: "He tells the truth about himself—in personal confessions and writings and thinly disguised incidents in many of his novels—because he feels a kind of compulsion to tell it. He is of the race of Augustine, of Rousseau, of Montaigne, of Tolstoi. He may be in part standing aside, interested, watching, as Montaigne watched the working of this queer *homunculus*, and recording it as an examiner might record the working of a watch or a dynamo, hitherto unknown. He records it partly without doubt, because he hates the lies and deceptions which are the alternative—for the same reason as Tolstoi made his confessions or Augustine produced his immortal work. He would not have anyone believe him to be anything but what he is. He will not permit a repetition of the Carlyle experience—a monstrous figure of perfection, preaching a gospel to a million followers, suddenly, after his death revealed in records and diaries as in life almost the negation of his preaching."

His defiant and determined resistance to the newspaper interviewer is only another sign of his unfettered veracity. He knows that a man's

views and casual remarks are often so contorted and mishandled by this fraternity that they become very deceptive, and he evades them at every turn. I had occasion once, myself, to apply to him for an interview and he very rightly refused me. This interviewing is a ghoulish business! All the world knows that much of it is pure humbug, and besides, Wells's great horror is to be "on show." Anyway, no interviewer could have given a more faithful picture of the author than is to be found in "Mr. Britling sees it Through." One can recognise the record of his own personal experience in the following paragraph in which Mr. Direck first meets Mr. Britling:

"Drooping out of the country costume of golfing tweeds he had expected to see the mildly unhappy face, pensive even to its drooping moustache, with which Mr. Britling's publisher had for some faulty and unfortunate reason familiarised the American public. Instead of this, Mr. Britling was in a miscellaneous costume, and mildness was the last quality one could attribute to him. His moustache, his hair, his eyebrows bristled; his flaming freckled face seemed about to bristle too. His little hazel eyes came out with a 'ping' and looked at Mr. Direck. Mr. Britling was one of a large but still remarkable class of people who seem at the mere approach of photography to change their hair, their clothes, their moral natures. No photographer had ever caught a hint of his essential

Britlingness and bristlingness. Only the camera could ever induce Mr. Britling to brush his hair, and for the camera alone did he reserve that expression of submissive martyrdom Mr. Direck knew."

He has been called a despot, a dictator and an egotist by certain sections of the socialist community, and I think he can afford to plead guilty to all these titles. He is a tyrant and dictator without a shadow of doubt. He is a helpful tyrant, a mellow sunny despot, but a tyrant all the same. In his latest revelation "The Secret Places of the Heart" we find much of the Wellsian tyranny introduced in Sir Richmond Hardy, the middle-aged Don Juan. Here he tyrannically explores the souls of his fellow-citizens, and brings to light those ghosts of the unconscious mind which are constantly preparing snares for their good designs, and those ghosts are the shadows which still haunt the twilight patches in the rational mind of man—the ghosts of lust and greed and cruelty. But he has first found such elements by despotically hunting for them in his own preserves, and by dissecting the secret places of his heart before the world. That is the tyranny of H. G. Wells—the tyranny of personal confession, which is his own, and at the same moment all the world's. And as for dictatorship, the man who advances on confusion and transforms it into cosmos, is of necessity an egotist.

All lively helpful men are egotists just in proportion as they have the power to live *usefully* and happily. To benefit the world, a man must be an optimist and an egotist in the same way that Wells is, and also be tinctured with a modicum of dissatisfaction with past achievements. The Wellsian guiding idea is : " If what you have performed in the past looks wonderful to you, you haven't done much to-day." So to sum up his pronounced qualities as revealed by his novels we get the following formula : Health and liveliness through useful activity (hockey on Sunday afternoon looms largely as useful activity !), patience—not too much !—persistency, willingness to give and take, seasoned with discontent to prevent smugness, long spells of irritation and indignation over the foolishness and wickedness of men who prevent themselves from making existence a fair and happy thing, and a great simple fearlessness which has never been turned or muzzled by the desire to " pose," obtain applause, or grind an axe.

Wells has the confidence of the thinking public—he is a safe man.

Perhaps we should write him down as a literary prodigy. " The Stolen Bacillus and Other Stories " appeared in 1895 when the author was still quite young, and we may assume that for some years before the publication of this volume he had been an adept in the difficult

art of the short story. In his early short stories there are hints of all the powers of an expert craftsman. The Wells of twenty-five is just as crafty, alert and lavishly fertile in fancy as the Wells of to-day. His early stories are unfinished drafts which he has developed more elaborately and insolently in his later work; but so far as style or literary cunning is concerned we must acknowledge that such a story as the "Lord of the Dynamos" leaves little room for advancement. Like Rudyard Kipling, he was a "strong man" in the world of literature, and the world has always been ready to welcome the strong man. He had a lusty air, or to use a gruff Saxon phrase, he had "guts." The only real aristocracy is the aristocracy of character. He possessed a lusty air, a cocksureness, and certain traces of brutality which quickly gathered about him a world-wide public. Few authors have so plainly stamped their work with the hall-mark of genius in their earliest years.

It is true that he is a barbarian in regard to literary usage; and whenever he talks about art he talks as though it is a side show of little importance. The artist who has "cultivated an extreme sensibility to colour from earliest years" and lives a life of fancy and meditation irritates him. I believe that it is possible for the designer of a torpedo-boat to be lured away from practical things by a craving for line and beauty, in the same way that a novelist may be led astray by the fetish-worship of style. Wells

is very fretful about art, and he speaks most directly of his thoughts concerning the literary artist in "Boon."

"The way of doing isn't the end. First the end must be judged—and then if you like talk of how it is done. Get there as splendidly as possible. But get there. James and George Moore neither of them take it like that. They leave out getting there, or the thing they get to is so trivial as to amount to scarcely more than an omission . . . ."

There is a tale—The Hammerpond Park Burglary—in which he relates how Mr. Watkins, a celebrated burglar, came to the "Coach and Horses" at Hammerpond in Sussex in order to separate Lady Aveling from her diamonds and other personal *bric-à-brac*. He determined to make his visit in the guise of a landscape artist, and is welcomed at the inn with much enthusiasm by half-a-dozen other brethren of the brush. Next day Mr. Watkins strolled through the beech-woods to Hammerpond Park, and at sunset pitched his easel with virgin canvas in a strategic position before the house upon which he was directing burglarious intentions. But one of the artists passing him at the time was staggered by his complete freedom in the matter of mixing colours and the irregular use of a brilliant emerald green :

"What on earth are you going to do with that *beastly* green ?" said Sant.

Mr. Watkins realised that his zeal to appear busy in the eyes of the butler had evidently betrayed him into some technical error. He looked at Sant and hesitated.

"Pardon my rudeness," said Sant; "but really, that green is altogether too amazing. It came as a shock. What *do* you mean to do with it?"

Mr. Watkins was collecting his resources. Nothing could save the situation but decision. "If you come here interrupting my work," he said, "I'm a-goin' to paint your face with it."

Sant retired, for he was a humorist and a peaceful man. Going down the hill he met Porson and Wainwright. "Either that man is a genius or he is a dangerous lunatic," he said.

Now Wells seems to incline rather to the methods of Mr. Watkins than to those of the true artists, for he is always eager to paint someone's face with his own peculiar colour. His attack on Henry James in his "Boon" is an example of the Wells method of face painting. For James, art was the soul of all things; in fact he was suffering from a certain mental hysteria which craved perfection in art. Wells has remarked of him that his mind was poisoned in early life by studio lounging, and goes on to say: "Thought about pictures even might be less studio-ridden than it is. But James has never discovered that a novel isn't a picture . . . . That life isn't a studio . . . . ."

CHAPTER II

Early Struggles

Herbert George Wells was born at 47, High Street, Bromley, on September 21st, 1866, the son of Joseph Wells, a great Kent bowler in the early 'sixties, who, it is said, is portrayed in the author's essay "The Veteran Cricketer." His intimacy with tradesfolk was determined at birth, for he first saw daylight amid the pots and pans and mixed commodities of a small general shop in the country. This shop is described with fair accuracy in "The War in the Air":

"Even from the first the greengrocer's shop which he had set up in one of the smallest of the old surviving village houses in the tail of the High Street had a submerged air, an air of hiding from something that was looking for it. When they had made up the pavement of the High Street, they levelled that up so that one had to go down three steps into the shop."

Bun Hill, the idyllic Kentish village of "The War in the Air," is a Wells landmark of importance, for it is the point whence starts one of his best novels, and it is in reality the market town of Bromley, the author's birth-place. A clue is found in Wells's description of it:

"The Crystal Palace was six miles away from

Bun Hill, a great façade that glittered in the morning, and was a clear blue outline against the sky in the afternoon, and of a night a source of gratuitous fireworks for all the population of Bun Hill. And then had come the railway, and then villas and villas, and then the gas-works and the water-works, and a great ugly sea of workmen's houses, and then drainage, and the water vanished out of the Otterbourne and left it a dreadful ditch, and then a second railway station, Bun Hill South, and more houses and more, more shops, more competition, plate-glass shops, a school-board, rates, omnibuses, tramcars—going right away into London itself—bicycles, motor-cars, and then more motor-cars, a Carnegie library."

Bromley is entered from the borders of smokedom at Catford, by Bromley Hill, from the crest of which Bert Smallways watched Butteridge return to the Crystal Palace after flying for about nine hours. Bromley is postally described as "in Kent" to distinguish it from the east-end Bromley, on the other side of the Thames. The surviving village houses mentioned by Wells are still standing in the High Street near the 17th century buildings of Bromley College. Over their roofs three centuries have passed, and the quaint coaching inn almost next door is a place of story and romance. Perchance, the small glass, china and miscellaneous shop was established by Joseph Wells in one of these flat-faced old-world houses, and it was here that the author

first followed with painful and perplexed interest the steady breaking up of the small tradesmen before the tide of prosperous stores. Anyway, his father's shop was not successful.

"My father was one of that multitude of small shop-keepers which had been caught between the 'Stores' above and the rising rates below; and from the knickerbocker stage onward, I was acutely aware of the question hanging over us."

The shadow of failure that presided over his home in those days enabled him to give us some vivid pages in "New Worlds for Old."

"In the little High Street of Sandgate over which my house looks, I should say between a quarter and a third of the shops are just downward channels from decency to despair; they are sanctioned, inevitable citizen-breakers. Now it is a couple of old servants opening a 'fancy' shop or a tobacco shop, now it is a young couple plunging into the haberdashery, now it is a new butcher or a new fishmonger or a grocer. This perpetual procession of bankruptcies has made me lately shun that pleasant-looking street, that in my unthinking days I walked through cheerfully enough. The doomed victims have a way of coming to the doors at first and looking out politely and hopefully . . . . Presently the stock in the window begins to deteriorate in quantity and quality, and then I know that credit is tightening. The proprietor no longer comes

to the door, and his first bright confidence is gone He regards one now through the darkling panes with a gloomy animosity. He suspects one all too truly of dealing with the 'Stores' . . . Then suddenly he has gone; the savings have gone, and the shop—like a hungry maw—waits for a new victim."

His mother, he tells us, was the daughter of an innkeeper at Midhurst (the scene of the climax of Hoopdriver's ten glorious days of romance in "The Wheels of Chance"), where the "Spread Eagle," one of the most famous inns in England, is a great attraction. His grandfather was head-gardener at Penshurst, and very possibly figures in "The War in the Air" as Mr. Smallways' aged father who could remember Bun Hill as an idyllic Kentish village: "He sat by the fireside, a shrivelled, very, very old coachman, full charged with reminiscenses and ready for any careless stranger. He could tell you of the vanished estate of Sir Peter Bone, long since cut up for building, and how that magnate ruled the country-side when it was country-side, of shooting and hunting and of coaches along the high road, of how 'where the gas-works is' was a cricket-field, and of the coming of the Crystal Palace."

After the hopeless fight against fate in the small shop at Bromley, the novelist's mother was fortunate enough to meet with a comfortable and well-paid berth as housekeeper to her former mistress,

Miss Fetherstonhaugh, at Up Park, near Petersfield—the Bladesover of "Tono-Bungay," and, perhaps, a memory of the Burnmore Park of "The Passionate Friends."

Wells received his early education at two schools at Bromley. First he was sent as a pupil to a "dame's" school for very young children, and afterwards to Mr. T. Morley's Bromley Academy.

For a time he was with his mother in the much cupboarded, white painted housekeeper's room at Petersfield, absorbing the manners and familiar talk of valets, ladies'-maids and butlers. Here he had every chance to study the strict etiquette and customs of the British aristocracy and to follow the social scale downwards to the village doctor and the vicar. The picture of the housekeeper in "Tono-Bungay" is a composite one, and is not really a true portrait of his mother —a very charming little lady, who is remembered with high regard by a large circle of Wells's friends.

While at Petersfield, we may hazard, he "surreptitiously raided" the bookcases in the big saloon, and devoured among other noteworthy books "Vathek"—"glorious stuff. That kicking affair! When everybody *had* to kick!"

This brings us to the year 1878, and Wells is twelve years of age.

After that came "the drapery," and he entered

a shop at Windsor* in 1879, where there is reason to suppose that he substituted "Gulliver" and Tom Paine's "Rights of Man" for the account books of his master, and became rather rebellious. Stevenson's essay, "A Defence of Idlers," shows that no time is really wasted, not even that which is idled away with a book. But this point is very hard to explain to a very illiterate and matter-of-fact head of a drapery emporium. We have no exact autobiography of this period, only the details and incidents of life in the drapery trade during those years. His distaste for the shop life led to his early transference as a pupil teacher to his cousin, Mr. Williams, a schoolmaster, at Wookey, in Somerset. "That didn't do," writes Wells, "there was something wrong with my cousin's certificates and I spent Christmas, 1879, at Up Park. . . . Then I went to Cowah, a chemist of Midhurst, on trial as an apprentice, but I wouldn't go on with that because I didn't think my mother would be able to pay the costs of all my professional training." Midhurst is the Wimblehurst of "Tono-Bungay"—an undisturbed country town—where "if the last Trump sounded . . . nobody would wake . . . and the chaps up there in the churchyard they'd turn over and say: 'Naar—you don't catch us, you don't! See!'"

It was perhaps a favouring and wise Providence

* Mr. Geoffrey H. Wells believes the name of this establishment to be Messrs. Rogers and Denyres.

that removed our budding Utopian from the emporium, for he might have turned his thoughts to arson—which he has hinted would be the correct method to remove such cheerless and soul-grinding places as drapery shops.

The chemist's shop at Midhurst was kept by those dream people Mr. and Mrs. Ponderevo—Ponderevo, the dreamer of dreams, the inimitable Teddy who was always wading waist deep in the romance of commerce: "Think of having all the quinine in the world, and some millionaire's pampered wife gone ill with malaria, eh? That's a squeeze, George, eh? Eh? Millionaire in his motor car outside, offering you any price you liked. That 'ud wake up Wimblehurst . . . Lord!"

About May, 1880, he was apprenticed to a draper with an extensive business at Southsea. During the two years he spent there he learnt much about the art and mystery of the trade: "Dimly he perceived how the great stupid machine of retail trade had caught his life into its wheels, a vast, irresistible force which he had neither strength of will nor knowledge to escape. This was to be his life until his days should end. No adventures, no glory, no change, no freedom. Neither—though the force of that came home to him later—might he dream of effectual love and marriage. And there was a terrible something called the 'swap,' of 'the key of the street,' and 'crib hunting,' of which

the talk was scanty but sufficient. Night after night he would resolve to enlist, to run away to sea, to set fire to the warehouse, or drown himself, and morning after morning he rose up and hurried downstairs in fear of a sixpenny fine."

Wells, writing to a relation, remarks that he "stuck that hell of a life" till August, 1882 . . . "then I declared I would kill myself if I could not have my indentures cancelled."

Eventually he determined to "stash up" his indentures in order to complete his education, and we find him an assistant master at Midhurst Grammar School at the age of sixteen. In his study of "Mr. Polly" he has given us an imaginative picture of what his life might have been had he decided to stick to his "crib" in the drapery. At this point we follow in the tracks of "Love and Mr. Lewisham" and discover H. G. Wells in the "passable-looking youngster" who is assistant master in the Whortley Proprietary School. We know it is Wells by the uncanny and machine-like application which he brings to his work:

"Up and busy at five, with all the world about one horizontal, warm, dreamy-brained or stupidly hullish. By eight, three hours' clear start, three hours' knowledge ahead of every one. It takes, I have been told by an eminent scholar, about a thousand hours of sincere work to learn a language completely—after three

or four languages much less—which gives you, even at the outset, one each a year before breakfast. Could anything be simpler or more magnificent? In six years Mr. Lewisham will have his five or six languages, a sound, all-round education, a habit of tremendous industry, and still be four-and-twenty."

Mr. Horace Byatt, M.A., headmaster at the Midhurst Grammar School, perceived that Wells was a brilliant youngster, and was greatly impressed by his rapid progress in Latin and science. He was assistant at Midhurst in September, 1882, and remained there until September, 1883.

When Mr. Lewisham obtains a scholarship at the Normal School of Science, South Kensington, he duplicates Wells's performance in real life; but at this point we drop Lewisham, to follow Wells as a teacher in training to South Kensington in September, 1883. In 1886 he moved from Kensington to a school at Holt, near Wrexham, North Wales, and very shortly after was injured in the football-field. A year of enforced inactivity at Up Park followed. He came to London in 1887 and obtained an assistant-mastership at the Henley House School, St. John's Wood, and so by way of editing the *Henley House Magazine* (which was started by Alfred Harmsworth), to the Street-of-Ink and the life of the literary Bohemian. Rudyard Kipling had arrived from India, and had taken up his quarters in Villiers Street

four years before Wells passed, from the combined post of tutor and lecturer at the University Correspondence Classes, held in Red Lion Square, to the trade of letters.

It was while Wells was acting as assistant to Dr. Milne at the Henley House School, from 1887 to 1889, that he obtained his B.Sc. degree with a first-class honours in zoology and a second in geology.

Wells at this time had been burning the midnight oil and generally overworking himself, and a breakdown in the form of the sudden bursting of a blood-vessel to his lungs at Charing Cross Station was regarded as a sign to "knock off work" for a while. There can be but little surprise that he was "bowled out" during this strenuous period when we consider his persistence in filling "the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run." The classes at Red Lion Square demanded a mind that never wavered a moment—a quick concentrated mind always ready to demonstrate. This was tricky work, and Wells with his uncanny cleverness and enthusiasm brought into it twice as much physical force as the ordinary lecturer. He was always on the steam. The class-rooms were badly supplied with fresh air and he was getting no severe bodily exercise to counteract the evil effect of brain fag. What little time he had was given to writing a manual of biology. The breakdown was inevitable.

Complete rest was the physician's order, but of course he did not know the kind of human volcano he was attending or he would not have wasted time and words on that kind of counsel. The young lecturer had forty pounds put away in the bank, and with this as his sheet-anchor he retreated to lodgings in Eastbourne. His recovery was rapid, and soon his vitality was passing into humorous articles for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, then conducted by Harry Cust. Nobody but the unsuppressible Wells could have written such high-spirited articles in such an awkward plight. It is true that Stevenson wrote: "The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings" under corresponding conditions, but we also discover Wells insisting that the world at all times is full of laughter. Here was our young author and his promising career held up in a cul-de-sac, and his body so weak that a journey down to the beach was an odyssey of effort to him, quite cheerful and alert. He was as resilient as an india-rubber ball. The whole secret of his success is his saving grace of humour. No one could accuse him of lacking the cheerful and keen outlook on life. It has been asserted that most men would rather plead guilty to the charge of murder than to the charge of being without a sense of humour. The humour sense directs a man's emotions to points where they are useful in helping him to acquire the

saving faculty of self-criticism and self-restraint, and it is through the lack of it that we become morbid, feverish, querulous, impulsive—always looking for offence, and of course finding it. It has been suggested that Shakespeare might have said just as aptly if he had thought about it, "a man without *humour* in himself is only fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; let no such man be trusted." Emerson has told us that a man with a lively perception of the ludicrous can not be irrevocably and unconditionally depraved. If a man can laugh heartily he is still convertible. Further, Emerson says that "when that sense is lost, his fellow men can do little for him."

Some modern writers seem to suffer from a positive dread of the comic spirit. They seem to aim at being wearily well bred, and *à la mode*. Wells is always out for fun, but it is also very noticeable that beneath his steady stream of humour we find a perfectly consistent and rather saddening current of censure.

Of the time when he was still struggling for his place, and those early struggles were as acute as Grub Street has ever known, he once confided to a literary friend: "I always wanted to write, but I suppose that is a disease which manifests itself in everybody's youth. As a boy I amused myself by producing a comic paper in imitation of *Punch*. I had an exceptionally hard time of it when I was trying to gain a

footing in journalism. I could get very little printed. With the exception of a stray article or so in the educational journals and one in the *Fortnightly Review*, I had only one manuscript accepted in four years. And I devoted practically the whole of my leisure—I was then an examination crammer—to writing. I fancy I must have submitted my work to papers to which it was unsuited.

"I had one woefully anxious period. A lung went wrong and falling violently ill I had to relinquish my cramming classes, and while lying on my back it was imperative that I should write articles and sell them or go to the parish infirmary. By a stroke of good fortune, which came in the nick of time, I chanced to read J. M. Barrie's 'When a Man's Single,' and there I found a number of useful hints and almost immediately caught on to the *Pall Mall Gazette*."

The publication of his humorous articles in the *P.M.G.* urged him forward to health and literary production. Mr. Thomas Seccombe in a very keen article in *The Bookman* (April, 1914) gives some interesting facts regarding the first literary men who stood by the young author and praised his early work:

"From being entirely unknown among quill-drivers, he began to be recognised as a recruit of almost inconceivable promise. He was hailed by Henley and George Steevens; among his earlier acquaintances in the craft were

Marriot Watson and R. A. M. Stevenson. A little later on he was on friendly terms with Grant Allen, Edward Clodd, George Gissing, and Le Gallienne. To these must be added Frank Harris, who recognised his ability by opening to him both the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Saturday*. Hitherto, he had seen himself in print mainly in educational papers and in the proofs of biological primers and manuals. Now he became a recognised writer in the Press, in the stalls of the theatres, reviewing books both scientific and literary. This journalistic year was 1894-5. Then came another shattering breakdown, which necessitated his turning from journalism to authorship proper; and he was very soon established at Woking, building up for the third time, and permanently, as it proved, a new source of regular and abundant income. Henceforth his life is submerged in his authorship. But in the meantime, something very important had happened. In the Royal College of Science journal, *The Phœnix*,* which Wells started, and which still lives, he had outlined a sketch of the romantic possibilities of a fourth dimension. During a slack time in the summer of 1894, when editors were not printing his work very freely and the outlook was doubtful, he took this sketch and in a fortnight of hard work he re-shaped it into a serial; fragments appeared in the *National Observer*; the whole,

* The title then was *The Science Schools Journal*. It was re-named on its revival about 1900.

or nearly the whole, appeared as 'The Time Traveller's Story' in Henley's *New Review*. He obtained £100 for the serial rights, and Heinemann published the little volume as 'The Time Machine: An Invention,' with a dedication to W. E. Henley, in 1895. The fame of this wonderful little book spread by oral transmission, for very little was done for it by the papers, always on the alert against unauthorised talent."

In October, 1895, he published "The Wonderful Visit" through the house of J. M. Dent and Co. This is considered by many leading literary men as the most perfect of all its author's stories. The *Literary World* found it "a clever satire upon the social ideas and manners of the day" and "thought it suggested Swift without his coarseness."

Beginning now to feel that his position as a writer was secure he indulged in a little bravado and literary sword play. He went brandishing his sword and hitting out freely at the empty-headed and inconsistent manners and ideas of current beliefs, and managed to get some very sharp thrusts at the smug society of an English country village in "The Wonderful Visit." In the words of the *Literary World* reviewer:

"The story opens with the descent from the clouds of a strange bird which turns out to be an angel dressed in a saffron robe reaching only to the knees. This, we are told, is the angel of art, and not the angel of religious

feeling, nor the angel of popular belief. The shooting and capture of this strange bird by a celibate vicar, with the embarrassments that result when the angel becomes the vicar's guest and by stress of circumstances endeavours to behave as a man, is told in a few racy chapters. The scandal created by the vicar's reception and harbouring of such an odd personage is cleverly indicated. Mrs. Mendham, the curate's wife, who sees the angel as he is led in by the vicar, mistakes the stranger for a woman, and of course jumps to an unpleasant conclusion. She is scarcely reassured by her husband's report later, that he had seen the angel clothed in a cast-off suit of the vicar's clothes. Next, Lady Hammergallow, the leader of society in the neighbourhood, arrives at a most damaging explanation of the angel's presence, connecting him with a supposed irregularity in the vicar's early life. The angel, as we have said, failing to get himself accepted for what he is, tries to adapt himself to his environment, and his efforts to understand the ways and thoughts of the people he meets afford excellent opportunities for the indulgence of Mr. Wells's peculiar vein of irony. The angel, it must be confessed, from contact with mankind, suffers a certain deterioration, and his behaviour in the drawing-room of Lady Hammergallow disappoints our expectation. How he ultimately comes to grief from making love to a maid-servant and horse-whipping a brutal squire, we would leave the

reader to discover, merely remarking that the angel's final exit in a fire at the vicarage, in the heroic attempt to save the life of Delia, the maid-servant, is another 'sorrowful ending.'"

I came across a journalist who journeyed down to Sandgate in 1899 to interview Wells, and he informed me that the author regarded "The Wonderful Visit" with particular favour at that time. The same interviewer also questioned him on how the idea of the story first flitted across his brain, and elicited the fact that it was obtained from Ruskin's assertion that if an angel were to appear on earth some one would be sure to shoot it. However, I have it from Wells himself that he now considers his best work lies between "Tono-Bungay" and "Mr. Polly" and a book he will publish in 1923.

I believe that the lightsome, jaunty, waggish humour in much of his work is a sure sign that he always writes with a natural freedom from sluggishness. I do not believe that he ever takes up his pen unless he feels buoyant and brisk. One feels instinctively that he does not give a fig for the exact, scholarly and cunningly chiselled style of work which we always find in morbid writers such as Oscar Wilde or Edgar Allan Poe. He likes to say a plain thing in a plain way. He is a lover of freedom, and life—of all Rabelaisian, reckless laughter—a lover of open hearts and sportive, joyous, jolly, jaunty people the world over. And being free from subterfuge and

hypocrisy, he is, of course, eccentric. He is a bearer of a message of stimulating hope in his "God the Invisible King." Again and again he affirms that God, which is the Everything, is good—he just slips in an additional "O" and spells His name Good. He does not believe in force—only in faith. He has more faith than one would at first acknowledge. He has faith in God, and accepts life—accepts everything and finds it very hurtful and evil. And when he finds it more hurtful and evil than usual he discovers the beauty of it all. In the last paragraphs of "Mr. Britling Sees it Through" he especially emphasizes this. After the warring, jangling energies of the world have snatched Britling's son away from him, everything suddenly becomes sinister and wicked. But behind this jungle of blood-stained rubbish, "these puny kings and tawdry emperors, these wily politicians and artful lawyers, these men who claim and grab and trick and compel, these war makers and oppressors," a great and benign power is slowly appearing, and we end on a note of hopefulness—a poetic symbol:

"Colour had returned to the world, clean pearly colour, clear and definite like the glance of a child or the voice of a girl, and a golden wisp of cloud hung in the sky over the tower of the church. There was a mist upon the pond, a grey soft mist not a yard high. A covey of partridges ran and halted and ran again in the dewy grass outside his garden railings. The partridges were

H. G. Wells, 1899

very numerous this year because there had been so little shooting. Beyond in the meadow a hare sat up as still as a stone. A horse neighed . . . Wave after wave of warmth and light came sweeping before the sunrise across the world of Matching's Easy. It was as if there was nothing but morning and sunrise in the world.

"From away towards the church came the sound of some early worker whetting a scythe."

* * * *

Cassell's Saturday Journal (April 26th, 1899) published an interview with Wells which throws some light on the author at a time when he was little interested in physical passion, polygamous men, and the terrors and pitfalls of marriage. It will be noted that in 1899 he possessed the same Jack-in-the-box enthusiasm that he possesses to-day. The following paragraphs are full of his vehement personality and red-hot purpose. It was this rapid, questioning, and restless brain that moved Henry James to write to him: "You stand alone, intensely vivid and alone, making nobody else signify at all." Wells's grasp of the possibilities of the future in 1899 is amazingly comprehensive. His conversation quivers with inherent power and vigour:

"But what is your object in dealing with the men and women of the future instead of utilising men and women as they exist now?"

"I have a special object in doing that. I am strongly of the opinion that we ought to consider

the possibilities of the future much more than we do. Why should four-fifths of the fiction of to-day be concerned with times that can never come again, while the future is scarcely speculated upon? At present we are almost helpless in the grip of circumstances, and I think we ought to strive to shape our destinies. Changes which directly affect the human race are taking place every day, but they are passed over unobserved."

"Do you believe in all the astonishing things you write about in 'When the Sleeper Wakes?'"

"I confine myself absolutely to what I consider are possibilities. I do not seize upon any and every wild idea that comes into my head just to be sensational. If in alluding to future events an idea enters my mind which is beyond reason I reject it. I depict the future as I think it will be—as far as I can see it. But I am conscious of the limitations of my imagination, and although I am ready to admit that my pictures of futurity may be totally at fault, the changes I predict are probably not so startling as the changes that will gradually occur in the course of two hundred years.

"Briefly, my work is an attempt to take men and women as they are and infer what may happen to them in the course of a few generations. That is what I want to know. I have my own views on the subject. For instance, I am convinced that the improvement in agricultural machinery will render labour in the country less

necessary than it is at present, and that the population of our villages will decline to the vanishing point. The few big towns will grow very big indeed, and in those towns will be concentrated everything that is best—the best doctors, the best preachers, the best cooking—so that people will be afraid to live in the small towns for fear of missing the conveniences and luxuries of the monster cities.

"Even labourers will reside in London. They will go out to their several occupations by means of swift motors. I can imagine motors rattling along at 200 miles an hour, a speed sufficient to allow of men leaving London in the morning to perform a day's work in any part of the country and returning home to sleep in the evening.

"With the advent of machines capable of travelling hundreds of miles an hour all our roads will have to be altered. Towns that are now important will disappear and bits of villages that are not easy of access in these days will become the most convenient places in the world.

"There is already a tendency for buildings to extend higher, and with lofty erections we shall have covered streets. I shouldn't be surprised at any moment to hear that it is proposed to cover in a thoroughfare in Paris, London, or somewhere. Then again, mechanically-moving roadways are bound to come. They are laying one down in Paris for the exhibition, and there was one at the Chicago Exhibition some years ago."

CHAPTER III

Paradox and the Abnormal Mind

Wells has one great hold on the British public, and that is his detachment from any paradoxical inclinations in his writings. Now if there is one thing the man in the street will not accept it is the paradox. The English mind is filled with sheer madness when anyone puts a paradox before it. Curiously enough Wells keeps all his paradox in his own life—and is serious—sometimes terribly serious—in his books. This fact alone is enough to reveal the fact that he belongs to the English lower middle class, and is very nearly an average man, abnormal only by reason of his astonishing mental vigour. He is too unrestrained, too English, too cordial for the paradox, and to him the attitude of such a writer as Oscar Wilde is exasperating. And yet there is often just as full a measure of sanity in Wilde's paradoxes as one can find in a Wells novel. All Mr. Britling's contemplations on the bettering of life and putting an end to all that causes war takes us no nearer the secret of world peace than Wilde has taken us in his witty demonstration of the insufficiency of the emotions as aids to culture-progress. From the intellect alone, he says, and truly, too, can the great

republic of the United States of the World come :

" As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular. The change will, of course, be slow, and people will not be conscious of it. They will not say ' We will not war against France because her prose is perfect,' but because the prose of France is perfect they will not hate the land. Intellectual criticism will bind Europe together in bonds far closer than those that can be forged by shopman or sentimentalist. It will give us the peace that springs from understanding."

There is usually something strange and unusual about the writer with a taste for ingenious inversions. You guess at once that the man who fights with contradictions walks on the left side of the sun, and, moreover, that he is a man whom influences other than those natural to his native heath have helped to fashion. Take one or two of our most brilliant paradoxical writers and I think we shall come to the conclusion that the cosmopolitan influence has been stronger, and that their temper and point of view is not entirely English. Directly you read Hilaire Belloc you realize that he has steeped himself in the Gallic spirit. His power with the paradox brands him as a man to whom nature has paid the compliment of framing different from his fellows. The English mind would assert that he is colour-blind and keep

him out of signal boxes on the railway, but in reality he is a refreshing specimen of sturdy individuality among a race of mere types.

If Wells ever achieves a paradox he will not leave it alone. He always wants to talk it out —to arm himself and defend and amplify. Not so Belloc. He is almost secretive and tries to slip past your guard with his inversions without being detected. In his introduction to Froude's essays, for example, he has written :

" Why then do I say that he was perpetually on the borderland of the Catholic Church ? Because when we leave for a moment the phraseology and the material of his youth and of his neighbourhood, he is perpetually striking that note of interest, of wonder, and of *intellectual freedom* which is the note of Catholicism."

We ordinary beings can see the Catholic Church in three dimensions only ; but Belloc uses the paradox to show us the fourth dimension. He does not argle-bargle about it. There is no interpretation. The die is cut—and left. Belloc pretends not to notice how appalling the assertion that " intellectual freedom is the note of the Catholic Church " must seem to Wells, or any ordinary Englishmen. Or again, Belloc speaks of a man who reminded him of " one of the great Huguenots whom France to her eternal loss banished by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and of whom a bare twenty

thousand are now to be found in the town of Nimes."

No one has given more paradoxes to our literature than Oscar Wilde, and no one was more detached from other men, which rather suggests that paradox is simply the truth of the abnormal mind. To Oscar Wilde the art of Wells would have seemed no art at all. Wells, he would have argued, "is natural, and to be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic." Wilde was simply an artist in search of things removed from the actual life of men. The multitude disturbed the very air he breathed. Wells loves the multitude and is the superman of the market place. He writes with a swaggering enthusiasm. Wilde wrote with an intensely subtle perverseness. He could give to common things a quality that made them seem sinister, and place them in worlds that never existed. Here are some examples of his unique method of literary inversion: "Art is greater than life, and criticism greater than art; there is no sin except stupidity; thought is dangerous; the three qualifications of a great critic are unfairness, insincerity, and irrationality; it is easier to do a thing than to write about it; life is a failure from the artistic point of view; in the sphere of action a conscious aim is a delusion, and worse than a delusion; sin is an essential element of progress; all bad art comes from returning

to life and nature, and elevating them into ideals; external nature imitates art; the remarkable increase in London fogs during the last ten years is entirely due to the impressionist painters; the sunsets are beginning to imitate Turner's pictures; lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art; the Japanese people do not exist; nature is always behind the age; art is our gallant attempt to teach nature her proper place."

Like Belloc and Wilde, George Bernard Shaw is nimble with the paradox, but there the resemblance ends. It must be insisted that it is about his message and not his humour that Shaw is serious. He spends his life in being sportive in order that he may not become shallow. He is not a literary man who takes occasional excursions into the realms of politics and morals as Wells is. He is wholly a political and moral reformer. "I would not have been at the trouble of writing a single word for art's sake," he has himself informed us. Even his jokes are of a special pattern and for their full enjoyment demand a complete sympathy with his sociological essays and plays. It is this that distinguishes Shaw from Wells—that his humour is produced by the profound earnestness of his belief. Shaw does not make "jokes" in order to entertain us; in fact he is a joyless ascetic at heart and his puritanical outlook has entirely dispelled any hereditary sense of Irish

humour. Life force has a curious way of turning all Shaw's serious thoughts into jokes, and yet there is no man in England with a more gloomy way of life. He has no sympathy with joy. The most superficial form of sympathy, as Wilde has said, is sympathy with suffering: the higher form of sympathy with others' joys is infinitely harder to attain to. And it is easier to sympathise with pain, he says, than to sympathise with thought. The dreary history of human persecution would not be such sad reading if men had unlearned a little of the art of sacrifice and learned something of the ethic of joy.

"All sympathy is fine, but sympathy with suffering is the least fine mode. It is tainted with egotism. It is apt to become morbid. There is in it a certain element of terror for our own safety. We become afraid that we ourselves might be as the leper or as the blind, and that no man would have care of us. It is curiously limiting too. One should sympathise with the entirety of life, not with life's sores and maladies merely, but with life's joy and beauty and energy and health and freedom. The wider sympathy is, of course, the more difficult. It requires more unselfishness. . . . . It must be remembered that while sympathy with joy intensifies the sum of joy in the world, sympathy with pain does not really diminish the amount of pain. It may make man better able to endure evil, but the evil remains. Sympathy

with consumption does not cure consumption, that is what science does. And when Socialism has solved the problem of poverty, and science solved the problem of disease, the area of the sentimentalists will be lessened, and the sympathy of men will be large, healthy and spontaneous. Man will have joy in the contemplation of the joyous lives of others."

CHAPTER IV

The Goal of Faith

In 1917 Wells was struggling with many new ideas of a World State, a Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and was travelling to a conviction that the goal of faith was the only thing worth fighting for. Like all poets and scientists he was urged forward to a belief in some sort of God by an unfailing vehemence of emotion which will not allow any mind of original power to rest. But his mind had many vacillations before he arrived at the idea of God the Invisible King —a *finite* God and "a single spirit and single person." In "War and the Future," which was the forerunner of "God the Invisible King," he seemed a man with a divided mind. In moods of depression and impatience he could scarcely see a measurable step made towards the world Kingdom of God "which is the manifest solution, the only formula that can bring peace to all mankind."

At the end of two years' war he thought mankind might have been expected to make a reconsideration of almost every outlook and proposition of life. It was a great chance to win back that youth which the world had lost. But the world seemed to wag on with utter unconcern :

"I see a multitude of little chaps crawling about their private ends like mites in an old cheese. The kings are still in their places, not a royal prince has been killed in this otherwise universal slaughter; when the fatuous portraits of the monarchs flash upon the screen the widows and orphans still break into loyal song. The ten thousand religions of mankind are still ten thousand religions, all busy at keeping men apart and hostile."

Is the wrangling of ten thousand religions the great evil of our civilization? Can the world win back the youth that it has lost through an Invisible King? And shall we come "struggling through into the golden light of His Kingdom, to fight for His Kingdom henceforth until we are altogether taken up into His being?" Neither Wells nor anyone else can answer that question. But this thing at least he has preached to our generation: that there is no way to the Kingdom of God but the way of an ancient simplicity. It is for the sake of "faith" that we must revolt; it is for the sake of simple things that we must destroy; it is for the sake of primal things that we must make all things new. It is by faith that we find God; but Wells "doubts if faith can be complete and enduring if it is not secured by the definite knowledge of the true God."

He is most emphatic on the point that the Invisible King is a finite and possibly a heavily handicapped God. Placing himself behind

the mask of Mr. Britling he hints that we all have very extravagant ideas about God:

"They have had silly absolute ideas—that he is all powerful. That he's omni-everything. But the common sense of men knows better. Every real religious thought denies it. After all, the real God of the Christians is Christ, not God Almighty; a poor mocked and wounded God nailed on a cross of matter. . . . Some day he will triumph. But it is not fair to say that he causes all things now. It is not fair to make out a case against him. You have been misled. It is a theologian's folly. God is not absolute; God is finite. . . . A finite God who struggles in his great and comprehensive way as we struggle in our weak and silly way—who is *with* us—that is the essence of all real religion. . . . . Why! if I thought there was an omnipotent God who looked down on battles and deaths and all the waste and horror of this war—able to prevent these things—doing them to amuse himself—I would spit in his empty face. . ."

He rebels against the idea that God owns all nature, which I think a very noteworthy point. His God is "a strongly marked and knowable personality" with things outside him and beyond him. He is limited and defined and almost human like ourselves, and is within nature and necessity. "Necessity," says Mr. Britling, "is a thing beyond God—beyond good and ill,

beyond space and time, a mystery everlastingly impenetrable. God is nearer than that. Necessity is the uttermost thing, but God is the innermost thing. Closer is he than breathing and nearer than hands and feet. He is the Other Thing than this world. Greater than Nature or Necessity, for he is a spirit and they are blind, but not controlling them . . . Not yet . ."

To the reader's question, "Are not the waves, winds and mountains God's own things?" Wells would reply that God does not command these things but only moves with them. He is the spirit that strides with time—" somewhere in the dawning of mankind he had a beginning, an awakening, and as mankind grows he grows . . . . He is the undying human memory, the increasing human will." It is rather curious that he should first suggest that God is " a person, a strongly marked and knowable personality," and " a single person and a single spirit," yet in the same breath claim that he is the authentic abstraction of all that is noble in human nature, which is dangerously near to the " stream of tendency " of the opponents of modern religion.

At all events his God is in distinct opposition to the pantheism of such modern poetry as Thomson's " Hymn on the Seasons " :

> These as they change, Almighty Father, these
> Are but the varied God. The rolling year
> Is full of Thee. Forth in the pleasing Spring
> Thy beauty walks, Thy tenderness and love . .

Then comes Thy glory in the Summer months
With light and heat refulgent. Then Thy sun
Shoots full perfection through the swelling year:
And oft at dawn, deep noon, or falling eve,
By brooks and groves, in hollow-whispering gales,
Thy bounty shines in Autumn unconfined,
And spreads a common feast for all that lives.
In Winter awful Thou! With clouds and storms
Around Thee thrown, tempest o'er tempest rolled,
Majestic darkness! On the whirlwind's wing
Riding sublime Thou bid'st the world adore.

Pantheism has certainly no part in the Wellsian creed, and yet it has claimed the minds of so many of our poets and writers. Shelley, the narrow and hasty sceptic, seeing in his conception of a world of purposeless forces no divine, creative spirit to worship, turned in moods of deep feeling to some turbulent object in nature and "troubled the gold gateways of the stars" with strange hymns. We think instinctively of that exquisite and barbaric "Ode to the West Wind":

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As thou, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thou with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

The ambition of the Invisible King is the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth—Wells's World State—"a group of republican cantons after the Swiss pattern. I can see no other solu-

tion that is not offensive to God. It does not matter in the least what we owe to Serbia or what we owe to Italy. We have got to set this world on a different footing. We have got to set up the world at last—on justice and reason."

In "A Modern Utopia" he tells us that the Utopian religion resists the idea of original sin and upholds the idea that on the whole man is good. He still feels vividly the truth of this, though there were times during the great war—"a demonstration in vast and tragic forms of the stupidity and ineffectiveness of our species" when he felt things were pressing down on him and that his hopeful view of the world was "like repeating a worn-out prayer." But once he had really experienced the environment of the Master he recovered at once. To continue the exploration of Wells through Mr. Britling, we may make a guess that it was during some of his journalistic vigils at his Essex home during the war, that he surrendered himself to the feeling that he needed a God who was not an abstraction nor a trick of words—but a "God of the Human Heart as real as a bayonet thrust or an embrace."

It was a terrible time for all of us and there were few who were not stirred to new depths of religious thought. It seemed only too plain that all our boasted proficiency in science had only ended in the worship of the great Juggernaut, armed power. When Kipling went up into the sky like a rocket in 1891 he proclaimed the

beginning of this decade of delirium. We cannot get the picture out of our mind! The banjo-bard marching ahead of the throng of Barney Barnatos and Whitaker Wrights, shouting his songs of "hot sand and ginger," telling his tales of creatures that once were men, slobbering over the low soul redeemed by the call of Empire, proclaiming the worship of emperors and adventurers and forestallers who in the end have betrayed mankind into a "morass of hate and blood—in which our sons are lost—in which we flounder still."

There can be little doubt that the swift and overwhelming tide of disaster during the war urged Wells towards a realisation of the Kingdom of the Invisible King—an idea which had been fertilizing in his brain for some time.

The conclusion arrived at in "God the Invisible King" is that personal immortality is not to be anticipated, and if he does not reject the idea entirely, he ignores it. The first purpose of the Invisible King is to aid the believer to suffer the annihilation of his individual consciousness with perfect calm and understanding, so that when death approaches his thoughts will be so intimately merged in the will of the Invisible King that his oneness with all things will take the sting from death itself. Wells elaborates this idea in a very alert passage. "God who captains us but does not coddle us," he writes, "will by no means undertake to hold the

believer scathless among the pitfalls and perils that beset our earthly pilgrimage. But God will be with you, nevertheless, in the reeling aeroplane, or the dark ice-cave; God will be your courage. Though you suffer or are killed, it is not an end. He will be with you as you face death; he will die with you as he has died already countless myriads of brave deaths. He will come so close to you that at the last you will not know whether it is you or he who dies, and the present death will be swallowed up in his victory."

The Invisible King does not profess to entice children, and as a matter of fact, Wells tells us that children have no natural love for God and no need of him. However, He is always near at hand, and if we are to form a picture of him from Wells's conception we can only think of a brisk sun-bronzed man riding a powerful horse—a genial, enlivening visitor who taps on the door with his riding crop and inquires "Is everything all right?" And when the children question about the stranger who sometimes calls they must be told that he is a very old friend whom some day they will need and know.

Frankly the Invisible King is not a mild and tender God, but a militant and gloriously adventurous God—he is a great ocean of fine feeling, and once the seeker finds him life becomes a splendid struggle to outwit mental lethargy—the unnecessary, gluttonous sleep, the mind-sleep. To Wells quietism is contrary to all the

laws of God and man. The finding of God is not a soporific which kills all imagination, "it is the release of life and action from the prison of the mortal self." There is no contentment once you have found God—for contentment does not breed progress. The whole idea of God is hopeless to him if the idea brings inertia and a natural-tinted tired feeling of safety.

CHAPTER V

The Saving Grace of Humour

I have put Wells alongside George Gissing in another part of this book. Gissing was a master of his craft, a writer imbued with the true spirit of Greek tragedy. He believed that evil, suffering and sin were things which were not to be eluded in this world. He had no faith in any Utopia. Tragedy seemed to him at once the only criticism of life and the highest plane of art. To Wells, vice, distress, poverty are the sequence of a sluggish and senseless manner of government. He sees no reason why people should not obtain supreme happiness both here on earth and in Heaven. Gissing was convinced that Heaven was a delusion. But it must be remembered that Gissing lived under the shadow of death. "Lung trouble," he wrote in 1897, "is still hanging over me; the future is very uncertain." And again he speaks of "three months of weary idleness dodging the east winds," and that he is "off northwards in the vain hope of getting a little strength for next winter." Later, in speaking of social engagements: "Society is a delight and a refreshment to me, but I am a prisoner nearly all my time." Again on a post-card from Catanzaro a touch of him at his best:

"Weather wretched, gales and rain, tornadoes, wrecks, but the Calabrian wine is no less good."

It is a singular thing that Gissing, the Apostle of Pessimism, was one of the brightest of companions. Morris Corres writes: "His laughter was whole-hearted. His sensibility was reflected in his refined face, and as he spoke his eyes lighted up with a rare brilliancy, giving a glimpse of a bright and beautiful soul. The vulgar and the sordid were to him an abomination, and in the midst of his greatest necessities he would never stoop to work he considered unworthy, or to 'take occasion by the hand.'"

As I have already suggested, Gissing's attitude of mind fills Wells with dismay. He has no use for the drooping heart in literature. He, like nearly all his characters, rebels against circumstance, and generally makes good. Like Mr. Polly and Mr. Hoopdriver he is a poet and a romancer, and is full of jolly joy and the bright visions of youth. I quote from "The Wheels of Chance":

"Mr. Hoopdriver was (in the days of this story) a poet, though he had never written a line of verse. Or perhaps romancer will describe him better. Like I know not how many of those who do the fetching and carrying of life—a great number of them certainly—his real life was absolutely uninteresting, and if he had faced it as realistically as such people do in Mr. Gissing's novels, he would probably have come by way of

drink to suicide in the course of a year. But that was just what he had the natural wisdom not to do. On the contrary, he was always decorating his existence with imaginative tags, hopes and poses, deliberate and yet quite effectual self-deceptions; his experiences were mere material for a romantic superstructure. If some power had given Hoopdriver the 'giftie' Burns invoked, 'to see oursels as ithers see us,' he would probably have given it away to some one else at the very earliest opportunity."

Among lively writers he stands securely in the first place. His work is always constructive, his message one of courage and good cheer. His sprightly humour has a hundred distinct moods and degrees. Take, for instance, the whimsical wave of humour throughout the chapter "Mr. Chaffery at Home," in "Love and Mr. Lewisham." There are some most telling arguments in favour of a more generous and sunny outlook on life here, and every line is put forth with a jest and a shout of joy and a dash of *naiveté*. Chaffery, the outstanding figure in this chapter, is a fraudulent and deliciously plausible fellow who is earning his living by practising deceptions on credulous spiritualists. However, he is not at all confused by any feeling of wrong in the way he employs his roguery as a means of existence, and proceeds to argue that his position as an impostor forms one of the bed-rocks of our present-day

society. Chaffery especially emphasizes the fact that there cannot be two or more different kinds and grades of lies. There is but one "lie" and everything in the world is part and parcel of it:

"But about this matter of lies—let us look at the fabric of society, let us compare the savage. You will discover the only essential difference between savage and civilised is this: The former hasn't learnt to shirk the truth of things, and the latter has. Take the most obvious difference—the clothing of the civilised man, his invention of decency. What is clothing? The concealment of essential facts. What is decorum? Suppression! I don't argue against decency and decorum, mind you, but there they are—essentials to civilisation and essentially *suppressio veri.* And in the pockets of his clothes our citizen carries money. The pure savage has no money. To him a lump of metal is a lump of metal—possibly ornamental—no more. That's right. To any lucid-minded man it's the same or different only through the gross folly of his fellows. But to the common civilised man the universal exchangeability of this gold is a sacred and fundamental fact. Think of it! Why should it be? There isn't a why! I live in perpetual amazement at the gullibility of my fellow-creatures. Of a morning sometimes, I can assure you, I lie in bed fancying that people may have found out this swindle in the night, expect to hear a tumult downstairs and see your

mother-in-law come rushing into the room with a rejected shilling from the milkman. 'What's this?' says he. 'This muck for milk?' But it never happens. Never. If it did, if people suddenly cleared their minds of this cant of money, what would happen? The true nature of man would appear. I should whip out of bed, seize some weapon, and after the milkman forthwith. It's becoming to keep the peace, but it's necessary to have milk."

All this has of course been expressed before by men quite as great as Chaffery (or Wells). But the one supreme and important fact is this: Wells through this veil of intellectual fooling is voicing deeper meanings to audiences who through their transits behold that fixed ideas and conventions, like fixed stars, are very much in motion.

The man who is always proclaiming that he is in the right is intolerable—especially when he is a Dissenter. So says Chaffery. And we must admire this man for one thing—if he lives by telling other people lies he makes it a rule never to lie to himself. After all few people can say that. He makes this point clear and goes on to elaborate the idea: "To my mind—truth begins at home. And for the most part—stops there. Safest and seemliest! *you* know. With most men—with your typical Dissenter *par excellence*—it's always gadding abroad, calling on the neighbours. You see my point of view?"

In " The History of Mr. Polly " we encounter Wells in his most sportive moods. The eternal boyishness of Mr. Polly is allied to a mellow and profound sense of humour which is quite as subtle as the Dickens touch.

Humour is the solution of life ; humour is life ; humour daily makes it possible to go on. That lively perception of the ludicrous, which we all possess in greater or smaller measure, has been very rightly called the saving sense of humour. It saves our souls alive. It saves our hearts from breaking. It saves us from drowning when we take a dive into a sea of sermons. It saves us from all manner of folly and wickedness and sorrow and despair.

Humour saved Mr. Polly. It helped him to resist severe attacks of indigestion, for no man can tackle " cold potatoes and Rashdall's Mixed Pickles " for supper unless he is prepared to outlaw the demons of dyspepsia with great gusts of laughter.

In the matter of humour, Mr. Polly is a greater man than Napoleon, who in spite of being a king of generals was a pauper in humour. Napoleon's pride was colossal, and the fact that it was in no wise balanced by any idea of humour must have made him a sore trial to his staff—we know that it made him a sore trial to the world. This type of man is never common-place—he is the victim of a divine prank. Being blessed or cursed with high ambition, great intellect,

impelling passion and self-reliance, he became the victim of his qualities. The tragedy of his life lay in the fact that unkind fate withheld from him the saving grace of humour.

Mr. Polly is as truly comic as some of the droll characters of Charles Dickens, and, unlike Dickens, his creator does not put all his humour in his books, thus leaving none over for his private life. One only need glance at him while he is talking to a friend, to know that he is a lover of free, reckless laughter, has spirits of brimming humour which are totally independent of his literary work. Often the humour sense has nothing to do with a man's capacity for laughter, or for inciting others to mirth. It is certain he can never be counted a humorist where Dickens stands supreme. But Mr. Polly is Wells in the book, and Wells is Mr. Polly outside the book. This cannot be said of Dickens and his characters. Mr. Edwin Pugh has written :

" I dare say that Dickens has caused as much mirth as any other author, and yet his sense of humour was curiously defective. It seems to have played scarcely any part in his private life. Certainly, it did not save him from taking himself far too seriously at times, or from occasionally making himself rather absurd, as a fuller sense of humour would. He had exuberant animal spirits, and that fondness for practical joking and buffoonery which one usually associates with that least humorous of young

animals, the schoolboy; but he had not, as Thackeray had, that faculty of self-criticism and self-restraint, and that half-sad, half-whimsical attitude towards life-in-the-large which betokens a richer and profounder sense of humour, and which is, indeed, more rarely found in the professional funny man than in the man of the world."

It is essentially because Wells is not a professional jester of the same school as Oscar Wilde or Whistler that his humour is really mellow and genial. To read Oscar Wilde one would never realise that men still gathered round the fire o' nights with tankards of ale, rejoiced in beef and pickles, loved their mothers and wives, engaged in warm and friendly banter, indulged in kindly nonsense, pursued love or feared death. Wilde preferred unkindly wit to genial humour, inhuman skill and cunning to open-handed strength; and compassion, pathos and tender feelings seemed to him to contain the tincture of the unfashionable and the homely. Against this point of view, however, one can hear the reader quoting from "Hamlet" to the effect that "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." And that may be quite true.

The sole purpose of Whistler's wit was to wound; and he tested his success by the deepness of the wound. This kind of wit is alien to the Wellsian style of humour which involves neither the malice of satire, nor the horse play of

burlesque, nor the stab of ridicule. True humour is infinitely finer than the knowing witticisms of Whistler—it is more delicate and impersonal. So we must arrive at the conclusion that Wilde and Whistler were merely truculent wags, while Wells is something much greater—a lover of humour and laughter for the reason that it teaches us our own shortcomings as well as the weaknesses of others.

CHAPTER VI

The Peterpantheism of Wells

Enthusiasm is the prevailing characteristic of the child and the man of genius, and when one comes to think the matter over the spontaneous energy of childhood is very closely connected, and bears a striking similarity to the spontaneity of genius. The eternal man is usually the eternal youth. One of the first things one observes in Wells is his spontaneity and eternal boyishness. We quickly discover the impulsiveness of the child in all his ways. He is always in a childish hurry, and his work is overflowing with the whimsicalness of the child. His youthfulness will last for ever. Like his great creation, Mr. Polly, he has the art of bringing his childhood into the dreary routine of manhood. The reader will recall how the Potwell Inn became gradually overspread with Mr. Polly's skittish influence, and how he lavished white and green paint on everything with the unexpectedness of a child:

"Even the garden palings were striped white and green, and so were the boats; for Mr. Polly was one of those who find a positive sensuous pleasure in the laying on of paint."

Wells is another Mr. Polly with his pots of paint,

and he has come splashing and flourishing his brushes into the gardens of ignorance and superstition. The world for him is a great floor game, a monstrous, absurd muddle, cloaking in some obscure way the radiance of God, who reveals Himself to those who can greet each day with the enthusiasm and breathless wonder of a child.

He would have all men play so seriously that a new saneness should come into their days. In his book of games for boys, "Little Wars," upon which he has described himself as "the author of 'Floor Games' and several minor and inferior works" he has very artfully hinted this: "Great War is at present, I am convinced, not only the most expensive game in the universe, but it is a game out of all proportion. Not only are the masses of men and material and suffering and inconvenience too monstrously big for reason, but—the available heads we have for it are *too small.* That, I think, is the most pacific realisation conceivable, and Little Wars (the Floor Game) brings you to it as nothing else but Great War can do." In another part of this book he has written: "I have never yet met in little battle any military gentlemen, any captain, major, colonel, general, or eminent commander, who did not presently get into difficulties and confusions among even the elementary rules of the battle. You have only to play at Little Wars three or four times to realize

just what a blundering thing Great War must be." This book was first published in July, 1913, and a few years later its author's deductions were only too well justified.

He is very serious over his two little books of games of the wonderful islands, tin murder, and the building of cities. Play is the thing, but his play is the everlasting play of the victory of common sense over folly: "Let us put this prancing monarch and that silly scaremonger, and these excitable 'patriots,' and those adventurers, and all the practitioners of Welt Politik, into one vast Temple of War, with cork carpets everywhere, and plenty of little houses to knock down, and cities and fortresses, and unlimited soldiers . . . . . and let them lead their own lives. . ."

It seems that Wells is the herald of Peter-pantheism in his own private life, and the great Charlie Chaplin has told us something of his indefatigable and unconquerable youthfulness. When Chaplin visited him he had much excitement and fun playing a game of H. G. W.'s own invention—a combination of handball and tennis. The author also played charades, mental guessing games, and did a clog dance—"and did it very well too," observed Charlie. He also modestly explained to Charlie that he "painted a bit"—and proudly exhibited a fireplace in his study decorated by his paintings—fearful and

wonderful colour images the reader will imagine —but on this point we are not enlightened.

Much, certainly too much, has been written of Stevenson's eternal boyishness. Now that is all wrong. Stevenson grew up. He wrote about pirates and "good yellow pieces of eight" with a kind of romantic regret; and the poems of childhood which he fluted on his little tin whistle were not written *for* children *by* a child. They were written, indeed, by a man in the grip of dreary routine who dared for a few moments to look back upon the little ghost of the past. Stevenson was a man writing for boys and yearning to lose his manhood in dreams of lost boyhood; while Wells is a boy, in triumphant possession of his kingdom, writing for men. But when he writes for children he becomes a child himself. He told his publisher that he hadn't in years enjoyed anything so much as making up his book of "Floor Games," and was rather disappointed that the Press did not receive it as cordially as it had received his "minor" works. "The public is so used to your more serious work that it doesn't understand when you go in for this foolery," remarked a friend to him.

"Foolery!" he echoed. "Why, man, any fool can interest the average man; but to write well enough to interest children one must tower above the common levels of humanity. A book that will amuse children is a big thing—a

wonderfully big thing. Just go home and read a page or two of 'Robinson Crusoe' before you dispute me."

In "God the Invisible King" he has pointed out that God is the buried and subconscious youthfulness which is in every man's heart. "God is Youth," he says, "and if a figure may represent him it must be the figure of a beautiful youth, already brave and wise. . . . . He should stand lightly on his feet in the morning time, eager to go forward . . . . . his eyes should be as bright as swords; his lips should fall apart with eagerness for the great adventure before him . . . ."

I must once more return to a comparison of Wells and Stevenson. In his "Floor Games" (Cecil Palmer) he gives the reader a sufficient impression that he understands children and that children would love him at sight. There is no literary cunning in him when he is writing for children—he sees and reasons with the eye of a child. It has remained for Wells to lay down the essentials of the ideal box of wooden bricks. They are alleged to be:

Whole bricks, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches $\times$ $2\frac{1}{4}$ $\times$ $1\frac{1}{8}$.

Half bricks, $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches $\times$ $2\frac{1}{4}$ $\times$ $1\frac{1}{8}$.

He has studied the subject from a practical point of view, and goes on to scold the toy manufacturers for their want of enterprise: "How utterly we depise the silly little bricks of the toyshops! They are too small to make

a decent home for even the poorest lead soldiers. We see rich people going into toyshops and buying these skimpy, sickly, ridiculous pseudo-boxes of bricklets, because they do not know what to ask for, and the toyshops are just the merciless mercenary enemies of youth and happiness. . . . . Their unfortunate under-parented offspring mess about with these gifts, and don't make very much of them, and put them away; and you see their consequences in after life in the weakly-conceived villas . . . that have been built all round London."

Now Stevenson, who wrote what is by the general consent one of the world's best books for boys, and has so lucidly interpreted the soul of childhood in "A Child's Garden of Verses," was never really enthusiastic over children and was very loath to play with them. All his songs in the "Garden of Verses" are of lost youth; just those kind of songs that weary disillusioned poets are wanting to sing to us wherever we wander over the wide earth:

> He does not hear; he will not look,
> Nor yet be lured out of this book.
> For, long ago, the truth to say,
> He has grown up and gone away,
> And it is but a child of air
> That lingers in the garden there.

On Mr. Gosse's authority Mr. Clayton Hamilton says:

"As a matter of fact, Louis belonged to the considerable and not unworthy class of men who always feel uncomfortable in the presence of

children who are very young. He didn't know what to do with them. He could write immortal poems in reminiscence of his own childhood; but he couldn't make a baby smile. Small children didn't like him, because he seemed queer."

The secret of Stevenson's awkwardness with children is not far to seek. He was eccentric and far from normal; his likeness does not reveal an exterior which would appeal to children. White, bony, beautiful hands, long hair, queer hat, flowing cape, are not the best passports to the freedom of the nursery. All children love normal men, and all normal men love children. So once again Wells's attitude proves the truth of Mr. Sidney Dark's assertion that he is as other men—"an articulate man of the people"—"a short stocky man with a scrubby moustache" like a million other fathers in our cities' streets.

One sign that he has not accomplished the foolish aim of the majority and pushed his childhood behind him, is that he still only works in childish bouts of spontaneity; and another sign is that he does not hire people to work and play for him. We who have lost the child-spirit and are too weary to play ourselves must perforce fall back on hirelings to play for us. The crowds that fight their way to the prize ring, race-course, cricket or football match is proof positive of this fact. Wells is sane and healthy and does not want dancers to dance for him or drummers to drum

for him or typists to type for him. He never dictates, but has written all his books and short stories with " his familiar fountain pen " by his own hand. The description of the dancing in " Mr. Britling Sees it Through " shows that he has not forgotten what real riotous play means :

" But it was very amusing dancing. It wasn't any sort of taught formal dancing. It was a spontaneous retort to the leaping American music that Mr. Britling footed out. You kept time, and for the rest you did as your nature prompted. If you had a partner you joined hands, you fluttered to and from one another, you paced down the long floor together, you involved yourselves in romantic pursuits and repulsions with other couples. There was no objection to your dancing alone."

It seems desirable here to refer back to an article on Wells in the *New York Herald* (April 15th, 1906) and to quote his own words on his secret of writing. He describes his bouts of spontaneity here as I have not seen him describe them in any of his books :

" When asked what was his method of writing, Mr. Wells said that he had not the remotest idea of how he did his books ; that they were just written, and that was all he knew about it. Neither did he know how much manuscript he turned out at a time. In an unguarded moment once he stated that he wrote seven thousand words a day. About a year after making this remarkable statement Mr. Wells said :

"'Well, you must say something, you know, and so I said that. That seven thousand words a day statement pursued me in paragraphs for months afterward, accompanied by every conceivable form of reprehension. After it had hounded me for quite awhile I thought it over one day and found that if I had written seven thousand words a day I must have written all my books in the course of a single year. That inclines me to disbelieve my own statements.'

"Mr. Wells has tried all sorts of *régimes* in writing in order to get the best results out of himself—which is, after all, every one's main business in the world. But he has not yet reached any final plan. Of course, it goes without saying that any author who turns out as much work as Mr. Wells does must be in a fair state of health to accomplish it, and he, therefore, conserves it with a reasonable amount of daily exercise taken in a regular way.

"That mysterious something known among literary people as 'atmosphere' is a fetish to which Mr. Wells pins considerable faith. He does not know what it is himself, and how to get it has always been a mystery to him. Atmosphere he has found is something that very frequently goes wrong when you do get it.

"'Sometimes,' said he, 'I fancy you get atmosphere by talking with people who talk well. At other times it seems to come out of solitary meditation, or it is wooed by persistent work

or by complete rest, or by society, or by slow work at home, or by going to live in a quiet farm-house.

" ' Travel to some place where there is neither paper, pens nor ink, always seems particularly conducive to literary atmosphere and a desire to write. I suppose that it is only another example of the perverseness of human nature.'

" ' Mr. Wells has tried time and again, as he has stated, to devise working rules, say, from ten to twelve a.m. and from four to seven p.m. every day for five days a week, or something of the sort. Any persistent regularity, however, he became convinced, led to dryness and lifelessness in his work, until finally he has come more and more to the theory of the happy moment and inspiration. He has found that he can do more in an hour in that condition of spontaneous impulse than in a whole week of regular effort.

" Almost all his early works were fairly spontaneous. His magazine essays, which were subsequently published under the titles of ' Certain Personal Matters ' and ' Select Conversations with an Uncle,' were written in that way. It was his custom then to get up in the morning and talk with Mrs. Wells about any ideas that he had in his head, and after breakfast he would sit down to work them out. If the inspiration did not come then he pushed the matter aside because it was sure to come later. In this way he used to do about three articles

a week, and is still satisfied with most of them. 'The Stolen Bacillus' and most of his earlier short stories were written in this manner.

"'The Time Machine' he wrote under an impulse in the same way. The material for it came wonderfully fast, and the final work of writing it was all done in a fortnight. Under those conditions he wrote steadily from nine in the morning until eleven at night, only stopping for the necessary intermissions of meals.

"Many of his long stories he wrote in intermittent periods of spontaneousness. They were often dropped in the midst of other work, then toiled at, taken to pieces and put together again in all sorts of ways. 'The War of Worlds' and 'The Invisible Man' were each written in this way in intermittent bouts of inspiration.

"At one time Mr. Wells tried to work according to what appeared to be the accepted recipe for serious endeavour. He drew up an elaborate scheme beforehand and worked with industry, planned out a scenario, memoranda, notebook and all the rest of it. When he recovered from that particular period he said that the Laocoon reminded him always afterwards of a novelist struggling with a scenario.

"In 'Love and Mr. Lewisham' he destroyed quite as much matter as appeared in the book. It emerged finally after an enormous slaughter of scenes and chapters. As he expresses it, he

saved one straight plank of the story out of a vast impossible scaffold he designed. While he was fairly well satisfied with the result, he was convinced that he could have done it much better spontaneously and without all that elaborate writing and destroying.

"'The First Men in the Moon' began as a short story about Cavorite. Then he decided to make a series of short stories, but he found that his goods would not pack into equal size bundles, and at last he had the good sense to give up the idea and let himself go. In 'The Sea Lady' he let himself go without bit or bridle. When the work did not right itself he put it on one side and went back to it later.

"Mr. Wells's inclination for work is not influenced by seasonable effects. Sometimes he will have three or four good days, followed by a kind of stupidity or indolence and distraction. Then, perhaps, comes one day which is good and a week of nothingness."

When the hilarious or spontaneous work does come to Wells, he makes himself physically as comfortable as possible, and the spirit moves him at all hours of the day and night as we may infer from his kindred soul Mr. Britling:

"Suddenly Mr. Britling threw back his bedclothes and felt for the matches on his bedside table.

"Indeed this was by no means the first time that his brain had become a whirring

torment in his skull. Previous experiences had led to the most careful provision for exactly such states. Over the end of the bed hung a light, warm pyjama suit of llama wool, and at the feet of it were two tall boots of the same material that buckled to the middle of his calf. So protected, Mr. Britling proceeded to make himself tea. A Primus stove stood ready inside the fender of his fireplace, and on it was a brightly polished brass kettle filled with water; a little table carried a tea-caddy, a tea-pot, a lemon and a glass. Mr. Britling lit the stove and then strolled to his desk. He was going to write certain 'Plain Words about Ireland.' He lit his study lamp and meditated beside it until a sound of water boiling called him to his tea-making."

A depiction of the personal appearance of Wells by a journalist who is a friend of mine is interesting. My friend speaks in the manner of Alfred Jingle and is strictly sparing in his description, but I jotted it down directly I reached home, and I think it is the best I have seen:

"Came to my office about some proofs. Saw him coming. Felt a bit nervous. Was astonished by his extraordinary high pitched voice. Didn't think I should like him. Didn't think I should ever understand a word he said. His high, sharp voice was much like that of George Meredith. It irritated me. Noticed

almost immediately that his manner was natural and almost child-like in its simplicity. He is rather a small man, medium height, tired looking blue eyes. His eyes belied him. Full of energy. Saw that. But the voice was not worthy of the man. However, he soon wins through to one's liking and admiration—he has a perfect genius for friendship."

CHAPTER VII

The Qualities of Literature, Ale and Motor-Cycles

In another part of this book I have hinted that Wells does not look upon the man who is merely a cunning and persuasive stylist with any great respect. Literature does not interest him merely because of any rare and exquisite qualities, and he would contest very stubbornly Oscar Wilde's dictum that "all art is at once surface and symbol." He expects to find in a man's writings (and carries out the idea in his own books) a mixture of literature and life in equal degree, and certainly in his last novel "The Secret Places of the Heart" he thinks of the two it is better to be short on literature and long on life.

The young school of writers who were following in the steps of the French *Decadents* in 1890 were willing "to forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he did not admire it." Wells would not forgive a man for making a useful thing if he did not admire it. That places him as an ordinary man—"one of us"—at once. Mr. H. M. Tomlinson declares that he would not give the "beard of an onion" for the addition of exquisiteness to Wells's work, and goes on to say, "Wells himself is of the crowd, not an artist—in the exclusive sense of that word—but one of

the multitude, superlatively endowed with intelligence and energy, the manifest spokesman for a scientific and industrial community."

No, if style alone is to be accounted the highest form of literature, he is no " literary gentleman " —an offensive phrase, I fear, but one that fits.

Style without any helpful purpose is a poor recommendation to any book. It is the same in literature as it is in the science of engineering. Let us carry the aim and end of style to the construction of that most modern branch of engineering, the motor-cycle. Now many people may think there is no such a thing as " style " in such a machine, and therein they are surely at fault. The outward appearance and sweeping lines of tube and tank and engine is a most desirable thing in a motor-cycle, and many manufacturers have come to financial ruin through sticking to an ugly style of design. But felicity of line and finish is not all that one wants—style must be attended with strength, a serviceable engine and fool-proof gears. It is possible for a motor-cycle to be artistically perfect and mechanically poisonous, and I take it that the same thing may occur in the making of a book.

Has Wells style? The question is rather difficult to answer. My own point of view is that he has a very rare style—the style of Dickens—a power of diction that cuts, and blazes a trail through the dense forest of custom. One has only to read his charming story " The Wheels

of Chance " to know how faithfully he comes back in the little affairs of everyday life. One is often attracted by his subtle use of words—excellent words that are to be praised because they are exact and definite. This is to be seen when he is writing of the magic quality of moonlight on the Sussex Downs :

" By the moonlight every man, dull clod though he be by day, tastes something of Endymion, takes something of the youth and strength of Endymion, and sees the dear white goddess shining at him from his lady's eyes. The firm substantial daylight things become ghostly and elusive, the hills beyond are a sea of unsubstantial texture, the world a visible spirit ; the spiritual within us rises out of its darkness, loses something of its weight and body, and swims up towards heaven. This road that was a mere rutted white dust, hot underfoot, blinding to the eye, is now a soft grey silence, with the glitter of a crystal grain set starlike in its silver here and there. Overhead, riding serenely through the spacious blue, is the mother of the silence, she who has spiritualised the world, alone save for two attendant steady shining stars. And in silence under her benign influence, under the benediction of her light, rode our two wanderers side by side through the transfigured and transfiguring night."

Wells's art is always close to actual life, and his style is in harmony with the common language

of the people, which is another way of saying it is full of homeliness. He knows that the " tears of things " are a part of actual life and not so much subject-matter and baggage of the crowd who toil up the slopes of Parnassus.

The most paltry incidents which happen to Hoopdriver become replete with mystery when his creator is near to illumine their wonder—he is alert, energetic, fertile in fancy. He tells us with peculiar appropriateness the effect a pint of brisk Sussex ale would have on a weedy underfed draper's assistant—we are dealing with the ale of twenty years ago, it must be remembered :

" At the inn they gave him biscuits and cheese, and a misleading pewter measure of sturdy ale, pleasant under the palate, cool in the throat, but leaden in the legs, of a hot afternoon. He felt a man of substance as he emerged in the blinding sunshine, but even by the foot of the down the sun was insisting again that his skull was too small for his brains. The hill had gone steeper, the chalky road blazed like a magnesium light, and his front wheel began an apparently incurable squeaking. He felt as a man from Mars would feel if he were suddenly transferred to this planet, about three times as heavy as he was wont to feel . . . . Surely the Sussex ale is made of the waters of Lethe, of poppies and pleasant dreams."

Not even style may be purchased at the price

of actual life in literature. Experts look at four points in good ale—flavour, colour, strength, piquancy. If beer has not a certain engaging flavour to it, then no amount of excellence in other respects can save it from being common "swipes." It is the same thing with the art and craft of letters. If a writer has no sense of actual life in his work, then all his style is of no avail. There is a brilliant atmosphere of "style" in Wilde's "Picture of Dorian Gray," but that does not save it from condemnation—it is tedious and stupid because it lacks virility, vitality, strength of creation, and the spirit of LIFE.

There is often an echo of Browning in the style and philosophy of Wells. It is very noticeable in "Marriage" when we hear Trafford probing deeply into the heart of things :—

"Perhaps I shall die a Christian yet. The other Christians won't like me if I do. What was I saying? . . . . It is what I reach up to, what I desire shall pervade me, not what I am. Just as far as I give myself purely to knowledge, to making feeling and thought clear in my mind and words, to the understanding and expression of the realities and relations of life, just so far do I achieve Salvation . . . Salvation! . .

"I wonder, is salvation the same for everyone? Perhaps for one man salvation is research and thought, and for another, expression in art, and for another, nursing lepers. Provided he does it in the spirit. He has to do it in the spirit."

CHAPTER VIII

"Russia in the Shadows"

As a man of letters, alive to the densely self satisfied and instinctively monopolistic outlook of the British people, Wells deserves praise for one important feature in this book on the collapse of Russia. The title is not a challenge. Instead of imposing on the public with an experiment in special pleading for certain Bolsheviki with a volume of suppressed facts, "Russia in the Shadows" honestly suggests "The Case against Bolshevism," and puts the reader at once into touch with all the terrors, hindrances and shortcomings of the Soviet Government. That is what we expect from a literary man writing a book "by request" on a *régime* which is in entire opposition to his own views on the jig-saw puzzle of class war and the new world methods of socialism. In the reviews of this book Wells has been often misquoted and misrepresented and so, at the outset, it will be quite as well to place on record his own disclaimer in regard to the suggestions of the Press and Henry Arthur Jones' absurd book "My Dear Wells" that he is in favour of Bolshevik methods. As a matter of fact his attitude to Bolshevism is not one of approval

at all. He has always opposed the *levelling down* of a people which of course is the intention of the Bolsheviki; he sees no peculiar profit in the mere destruction of capitalism, the disuse of money and trading and the effacement of all social differences which are all their principles. But at the same time he also opposes the obstinate resistance of the English mind to much that is just and noble in the cult of Bolshevism.

There is a story of an Indian Prince who, acting as a judge, having heard one side of the case, had the matter fully balanced in his mind, but who having heard the other also, had no judgment at all on it, and then declared himself as follows: "I am weary of all this talking and cold argument. This method of trying to arrive at judgment by hearing both sides is a foolish plan, and makes any decision quite out of the question. It defeats justice, and since justice calls upon me to give *some* judgment, it is my plain duty never to hear both sides again." Now anyone who wishes to keep his delusions about Bolshevism must not under any conditions read Wells's book. Like the Indian Prince the British public have these Bolsheviki judged to a nicety—but unfortunately their judgment is based on the crazier section of the British Press. They think of the members of the Soviet Government as a wild mob only distinguished for their licentiousness, debauchery and barbarous

cruelty. The picture is quite persistent in the papers and magazines, with the luxurious interior of a "looted" Russian palace, champagne in buckets, and dark-eyed Russian damsels accepted with a nodded "Of course." But a moment's thought should give the reader the true picture. Wells has it very sharply defined in his book. He tells us that drugs and medicine during his visit to Russia were unattainable, strengthening and stimulating food was not procurable in the best hospital, hardly anyone had a change of underclothing, everybody used old leaky boots, distinguished scientific men and members of the Soviet Government considered themselves lucky if they were issued with say a piece of damp clay-like bread in addition to their daily ration, as a reward for meritorious service to the existing *régime*. Collars, ties, shoelaces, sheets and blankets, spoons and forks, all the haberdashery and crockery of life, were not to be purchased anywhere. There was no replacing a broken piece of crockery unless one stole out in the darkness and entered into illegal trading with a pariah huckster. All trading was called "speculation," and had become unlawful. The detected trader who was found guilty of buying and selling with a covetous desire to make money was stood up against a wall and shot.

This is a dreadful state of affairs, and it has not become a great deal better since Wells wrote

his book. But the Bolsheviks have done quite as well as any other method of Government in trying to build a new Russia in the face of blockade and civil and foreign war. It is useless for the British citizen to blink at the fact that we spent £100,000,000 in various attempts to starve and cripple the Bolsheviki. Besides the active hostilities we conducted or supported for many months, we enforced a rigid blockade, intended, as far as possible to deprive Russia of the necessaries of life. One of the most terrible results of the blockade was the fact that it stopped the supplies of anæsthetics reaching the hospitals. One need not have a vivid imagination to picture the tortures endured in the operating theatres as a direct result of such a hold up. Supported by the British, the " armies of Koltchak, Denikin and Wrangel ranged over vast areas, wasting, ravaging, destroying the means of subsistence, bridges, roads, machinery, transport—a factor of tremendous importance in the causation of the famine." The Englishman who is inclined to cavil at Wells's sympathy for the creative effort of the Bolshevik must always remember these facts.

" Who are these Bolsheviki ? " he asks the reader. " They are Marxist Socialists." Marx died forty years ago, and he has always regarded him as a bore of the extremest sort.

" When I encountered Marxists I disposed of them by asking them to tell me exactly what

people constituted the proletariat. None of them knew. No Marxist knows. In Gorky's flat I listened with attention while Bokaiev discussed with Shalyapin the fine question of whether in Russia there was a proletariat at all, distinguishable from the peasants. As Bokaiev has been head of the Extraordinary Commission of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Petersburg, it was interesting to note the fine difficulties of the argument. The 'proletarian' in the Marxist jargon is like the 'producer' in the jargon of some political economists, who is supposed to be a creature absolutely distinct and different from the 'consumer.' So the proletarian is a figure put into flat opposition to something called capital. I find in large type outside the current number of the *Plebs*, 'The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.' Apply this to a works foreman who is being taken in a train by an engine-driver to see how the house he is having built for him by a building society is getting on. To which of these immiscibles does he belong, employer or employed? The stuff is sheer nonsense."

Among the things Wells wanted most to see amid the social collapse in Russia was the work of his old friend Maxim Gorky. It seems that he found the famous novelist acting as a semi-official salvage man. During the catastrophe of 1917-18 the scientific workers were pushed to the wall in every way, and at first the Soviet

Government were too confused and harassed by the wild disorder of the mob to think about this class of worker. So it followed that doctors and chemists were reduced to a state of utmost privation.

It was to the assistance of the survivors of the Russian scientific, literary and artistic world that Gorky first lent aid. It is chiefly through his effort that "there has now been organised a group of salvage establishments, of which the best and most fully developed is the House of Science in Petersburg, in the ancient palace of the Archduchess Marie Pavlova. Here we saw the headquarters of a special rationing system which provides as well as it can for the needs of four thousand scientific workers and their dependants—in all perhaps for ten thousand people. At this centre they not only draw their food rations, but they can get baths and barber, tailoring, cobbling and the like conveniences. There is even a small stock of boots and clothing. There are bedrooms, and a sort of hospital accommodation for cases of weakness and ill-health."

Wells spent a few hours at this institution and met there many celebrated men—careworn and dispirited looking figures—among whom were such famous names as Oldenburg the orientalist, Kaspinsky the geologist and Pavloff the Nobel prizeman. They were without new instruments, short of paper and working in badly fitted *cold*

laboratories. Yet they were still moving forward. Manuchin claims to have worked out "an effectual cure for tuberculosis, even in advanced cases; I have brought back abstracts of Manuchin's work for translation and publication here . . "

Besides the salvage of scientific and literary work and workers, Maxim Gorky has charge of a third and still more curious organisation for the preservation of works of art, antiquities and the like which have passed into the possession of the new social system:

"The palace that once sheltered the British Embassy is now like some congested second-hand art shop in the Brompton Road. There are big rooms crammed with statuary; never have I seen so many white marble Venuses and sylphs together, not even in the Naples Museum. There are stacks of pictures of every sort, passages choked with inlaid cabinets piled up to the ceiling; a room full of cases of old lace, piles of magnificent furniture. This accumulation has been counted and catalogued. And there it is. I could not find out that any one had an idea of what was ultimately to be done with all this lovely and elegant litter."

I think that Wells's naive doubtfulness as to what would become of all this elegant litter is all my eye and Betty Martin. He has a very good idea, I think. Surely it is being sold to the art dealers in the United States, and finding its way back in the form of dollars to the Soviet Head-

quarters in London. If this is not the case it is very puzzling how the Soviet Banking Department come by the large dollar drafts they are so frequently selling to the London banks.

The Home of Rest for Workmen in the Kamenni Ostrof seems to be rather a fanciful idea for a nation of starving people. In this place workers are sent to live a life of luxury and elegance for a month at a time. "It is a very beautiful country house with big gardens, an orangery, and subordinate buildings. The meals are served on white cloths with flowers upon the table and so forth. And the worker has to live up to these elegant surroundings. It is a part of his education. If in a forgetful moment he clears his throat in the good old resonant peasant manner and spits upon the floor, an attendant, I was told, chalks a circle about the defilement and obliges him to clean the offended parquetry . . . But, after all, the idea of civilising your workpeople by dipping them into pleasant surroundings is, in itself, rather a good one . . . "

Wells was very curious to see Lenin, and was disposed to be hostile to him. He journeyed to Moscow for the sole purpose of meeting this fierce little man, and found him at a great desk in one of the palatial halls of the Kremlin :

"I had come expecting to struggle with a doctrinaire Marxist. I found nothing of the sort. I had been told that Lenin lectured people ;

he certainly did not do so on this occasion. Much has been made of his laugh in the descriptions, a laugh which is said to be pleasing at first and afterwards to become cynical. This laugh was not in evidence. His forehead reminded me of some one else—I could not remember who it was, until the other evening I saw Mr. Arthur Balfour sitting and talking under a shaded light. It is exactly the same domed, slightly one-sided cranium. Lenin has a pleasant, quick-changing, brownish face, with a lively smile and a habit (due perhaps to some defect in focussing) of screwing up one eye as he pauses in his talk."

Lenin's dream is the electrification of Russia, and he is putting forward a scheme for the development of power stations to serve whole provinces with light, transport and industrial power :

" We opened our talk with a discussion of the future of the great towns under Communism. I wanted to see how far Lenin contemplated the dying out of the towns in Russia. The desolation of Petersburg had brought home to me a point I had never realised before, that the whole form and arrangement of a town is determined by shopping and marketing, and that the abolition of these things renders nine-tenths of the buildings in an ordinary town directly or indirectly unmeaning and useless. ' The towns will get very much smaller,' he admitted. ' They will be different. Yes, quite different.' That, I

suggested, implied a tremendous task. It meant the scrapping of the existing towns and their replacement. The churches and great buildings of Petersburg would become presently like those of Novgorod the Great or like the temples of Paestum. Most of the town would dissolve away. He agreed quite cheerfully."

CHAPTER IX

The Progress of Mr. Polly

When we come to " The History of Mr. Polly " we are getting very near to Wells at his best. The whole story is a spontaneous gesture of pure feeling. The essays in prophetic fiction betray the conscious resolution of a clever man of letters to make the most effective use of good material. But Mr. Polly is a bout of spontaneity. The wonderful and rather tedious land of Utopia where we are given pictures of radiant men and women walking through noble spaces oblivious of the puffy bustle and confusion of our work-a-day world, is ingenious and well managed. The point is made. The workmanship is agreeable. But such work rarely succeeds in carrying the reader, as the reader is carried upon the tide of Mr. Polly's revolt against indigestion and respectability. The value of Wells's traffics and discoveries over the seas of time and space is less than the adventures of this shabby little draper with his craving for books and romance and life.

Mr. Polly is, of course, a variant of Wells. But like Kipps and Smallways and Hoopdriver he is not quite Wells, but the author as Mr. Polly tells us what he felt like as a servant of

retail trade. As a matter of fact he had never forgiven the destiny which sent him to a department store. At the dinner in London of the Conference of the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants (April 16th, 1922) he related in a letter how he narrowly escaped becoming a drapery assistant for the rest of his earthly term.

"As you know, I began life behind the counter (draper's counter) when I was thirteen, and I suppose if I had had a normal ability to pack parcels and respect my shop-walker I should have been a draper's assistant all my life.

"What got me out of business was nothing but incompetence.

"I couldn't handle the stuff skilfully, and I couldn't keep bright and attentive for long spells.

"I can work pretty well in short spells, but then I must knock off for half an hour or so before I can go on, and the staying power of my colleagues filled me with astonishment and envy.

"To this day the steady good temper and patient alertness of the shop assistant compels my admiration."

Perhaps it is as well to recite the outline of the story at this stage. Mr. Polly was first instructed at a National School by more or less mud-brained and spiritless teachers, and when he was about twelve he was jerked away to

a dingy private school to "finish off," where "book-keeping and French were pursued (but never effectually overtaken) under the guidance of an elderly gentleman, who wore a non-descript gown and took snuff, wrote copperplate, explained nothing, and used a cane with remarkable dexterity and gusto."

He had a feeling for literature and read voraciously, if without any definite goal. Even as a boy of fourteen, after he had emerged from the "valley of the shadow of education," there still remained with him a little cloud of hope—which seemed to float in the background of his brain—an idea that there was interest and happiness in the world if he could only break through to it:

"Deep in the being of Mr. Polly, deep in that darkness, like a creature which has been beaten about the head and left for dead but still lives, crawled a persuasion that over and above the things that are jolly and 'bits of all right,' there was beauty, there was delight; that somewhere—magically inaccessible perhaps, but still somewhere—were pure and easy and joyous states of body and mind.

"He would sneak out on moonless winter nights and stare up at the stars, and afterwards find it difficult to tell his father where he had been."

Each one of us contains within himself that invisible sun which was burning so fitfully in

Mr. Polly's twilight soul. It is the light that Sir Thomas Browne and all the meditative philosophers have recognised as the centre of the universe—"Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us." We are all inclined in a busy and fussy world to ignore this light. Nothing is so characteristic of the sweltering confusion of these days as the growing habit of endeavouring to seek delight outside of ourselves. But there is an old saying that if you want all to be well with life you must begin by being well with life yourself.

However, it cost Mr. Polly many of the best years of his life to find the way to the highlands and mountains of happiness. At fourteen he was apprenticed to the hosiery and gentlemen's outfitting. He did not get many rises, and lost "cribs" with astonishing steadiness. There was the far-away dreamy look of the visionary in his eyes, and if he could have appreciated the poems of W. B. Yeats his imagination might have responded to those imperishable lines:

> And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
> dropping slow,
> Dropping from the veils of the morning to where
> the cricket sings;
> There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple
> glow,
> And evening full of the linnet's wings.
>
> I will arise and go now, for always night and day
> I hear lake water lapping, with low sounds by the
> shore;
> While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements
> gray,
> I hear it in the deep heart's core.

As it was, however, he was always "dreaming of picturesque and mellow things, and reading Rabelais and Shakespeare with gusto; and he loved Falstaff and Hudibras and coarse laughter, and the old England of Washington Irving and the memory of Charles the Second's courtly days. His progress was necessarily slow. He would have lost his places oftener if he had not been at times an exceptionally brilliant salesman, rather carefully neat, and a slow but very fair window-dresser."

Then he went to Canterbury where his soul adventured among the masterpieces of Gothic architecture. His mind became tuned to the key of the Middle Ages and he found chords within himself which joyously responded to the hoary age of this dear grey city. As he walked its tortuous streets and lanes he had the feeling of the traveller returned. He felt that it was the absolute earth of his forbears and the place gave him the strangest sense of being at home.

Wells's description of Canterbury is well worth careful study as illustrating the value of place, atmosphere and environment in the highest fiction. In the following passage we obtain a glimpse of the feeling Mr. Polly had for the drowsy magic of the cathedral. Wells writes of the place with an incontestable truth, as of things desperately dear and intimate, with the result that they become to the reader suggestive word-pictures that linger in the memory:

"He liked to sit in the nave during the service, and look through the great gates at the candles and choristers, and listen to the organ-sustained voices, but the transepts he never penetrated because of the charge for admission. The music and the long vista of the fretted roof filled him with a vague and mystical happiness that he had no words, even mispronounceable words, to express. But some of the smug monuments in the aisles got a wreath of epithets: 'Metrorious urnfuls,' 'funererial claims,' 'dejected angelosity,' for example. He wandered about the precincts, and speculated about the people who lived in the ripe and cosy houses of grey stone that cluster there so comfortably. Through green doors in high stone walls he caught glimpses of level lawns and blazing flower-beds; mullioned windows revealed shaded reading-lamps and disciplined shelves of brown bound books. Now and then a dignitary in gaiters would pass him ('Portly capon'), or a drift of white-robed choir boys cross a distant arcade and vanish in a doorway, or the pink and cream of some girlish dress flit like a butterfly across the cool still spaces of the place. Particularly he responded to the ruined arches of the Benedictine's Infirmary and the view of Bell Harry Tower from the school building. He was stirred to read the 'Canterbury Tales.'"

The literary appeal of Canterbury is overwhelming, and somehow I feel that I cannot

return to Mr. Polly without shaking hands with our old friend Micawber. I wish he had a great extravagant statue somewhere in the town, and that they would pull down a red brick chapel or some such mournful building to make room for it. Micawber took up a temporary residence at the Sun Inn: "It was a little place where Mr. Micawber put up, and he occupied a little room in it." And we must not overlook the alert wisdom of Mrs. Micawber: "We came, and saw the Medway. My opinion of the coal trade on that river is, that it may require talent, but that it certainly requires capital. Talent Mr. Micawber has; capital Mr. Micawber has not. . . . Being so near here, Mr. Micawber was of opinion that it would be rash not to come on and see the cathedral. Firstly, on account of its being so well worth seeing, and our never having seen it; and secondly, on the great probability of something turning up in a cathedral town. We have been here three days. Nothing has, as yet, turned up." And we must not forget to look for Mr. Dick, who sojourned at the County Inn, which is perchance the Fountain Hotel.

A great change was brought about in the life of Mr. Polly by the death of his father. He inherited three hundred and fifty pounds and with this legacy he turned his thoughts to marriage, or rather his thoughts were cunningly turned for him. On his wedding day Mr. Polly

was speculating in his mind whether flight at the eleventh hour would be criminal or merely bad taste, and when his eyes first fell upon his bride he was filled with conflicting emotions: "Alarm, desire, affection, respect—and a queer element of reluctant dislike, all played their part in that complex eddy. The grey dress made her a stranger to him, made her stiff and commonplace; she was not even the rather drooping form that had caught his facile sense of beauty when he had proposed to her in the recreation ground."

But Uncle Pentstemon stood up like a great barrier between Polly and any hope of escape—"a fragment from the ruder agricultural past of our race." He buttonholed Polly and held him prisoner:

"You *got* to get married," said Uncle Pentstemon. "That's the way of it. Some has. Some hain't. I done it long before I was your age. It hain't for me to blame you. You can't 'elp being the marrying sort any more than me. It's nat'ral—like poaching, or drinking, or wind on the stummik. You can't 'elp it, and there you are! As for the good of it, there hain't no particular good in it as I can see. It's a toss up. The hotter come, the sooner cold; but they all gets tired of it sooner or later. . . . I hain't no grounds to complain. Two I've 'ad and buried, and might 'ave 'ad a third, and never no worrit with kids—never. . . ."

Consider the humour of that wedding; not a sentence that rings false or strained, only the unnecessary left out. Of course a wedding never said so many pointed and exhilarating things before without saying a great number of drab and dreary things too. But Wells omits, just because he is an artist and not a photographer. It is a thousand weddings rolled into one and sealed with the "easy impudence of genius." Take Mr. Voules, "a licensed victualler who very kindly drove over in a high-hung dogcart from Sommershill with a plump well-dressed wife, to give the bride away." Could one find a character more absolutely true, more irresistibly amusing? Mr. Voules somehow guessed Mr. Polly's longing to desert the bride at the last moment. A freak of fancy set Polly dreaming in church, and swathed him about so thickly that he forgot all about Miriam. Somewhere in the future he was with a beautiful girl with red hair marching along some splendid aisle. He was trying to capture the transient loveliness of this dream bride of his when he became aware of the watchful blue eye of Mr. Voules: "It was the eye of a man who has got hold of a situation. He was a fat, short, red-faced man, clad in a tight-fitting tail-coat of black and white check, with a coquettish bow tie under the lowest of a number of crisp little red chins. He held the bride under his arm with an air of invincible championship, and his free arm

flourished a grey top-hat of an equestrian type. Mr. Polly instantly learnt from that eye that Mr. Voules knew all about his longing for flight. Its azure-rimmed pupil glowed with disciplined resolution. It said: 'I've come to give this girl away, and give her away I will. I'm here now, and things have to go on all right. So don't think of it any more'—and Mr. Polly didn't. A faint phantom of a certain 'lill dog' that had hovered just beneath the threshold of consciousness vanished into black impossibility."

For fifteen years Mr. Polly was a struggling shopkeeper at Fishbourne. They were very tedious years for him, and all dreams of a mellow and ruddy-faced method of life had quickly vanished. "He had visualized himself and Miriam first as at breakfast on a clear bright winter morning amidst a tremendous smell of bacon, and then as having muffins for tea. He had also thought of sitting on the beach on Sunday afternoons, and of going for a walk in the country behind the town and picking marguerites and poppies. But, in fact, Miriam and he were usually extremely cross at breakfast, and it did not run to muffins at tea. And she didn't think it looked well, she said, to go trapesing about the country on Sundays." As time went on he began to hate Miriam, who had developed a meagre and irritating quality of her own, and went about with knitted brows, ardently banishing all the ease and quiet

enjoyment of the home before some ideal of "'aving everything right." She combined earnestness of spirit with great practical incapacity. The house was never really trim and tidy, but always in an everlasting state of spring-cleaning. Polly's financial position was also fast becoming perilous, too. It was soon manifest that his shop was a failure. Suddenly one day it came to him that his life was an impossible struggle and his outlook was utterly hopeless. His mind became possessed with the idea of suicide, and he planned to burn down his shop and take his own life at one stroke, thus giving his wife the advantage of a fair sum of money in the way of insurance. He managed to set half the town of Fishbourne ablaze, but somehow he neglected the suicide undertaking. However, he determined that a return to the old way of life was impossible and he determined to alter it at any price. He made up his mind to sneak away from the town—to "clear out."

"The insurance money he was to receive made everything humane and kindly and practicable. He would 'clear out' with justice and humanity. He would take exactly twenty-one pounds, and all the rest he would leave to Miriam. That seemed to him absolutely fair. Without him, she could do all sorts of things—all the sorts of things she was constantly urging him to do . . ."

By country roads, picking his way leisurely, he came to the Potwell Inn—a pleasant riverside

hostelry with mossed and mouldering purplish tile and axe-hewn timber. Tired and desiring food, keen also for rest, he stopped before it. The inn received him, and he found there the plumpest woman he had ever seen, seated in the midst of the bottles, glasses and glittering things, peacefully and tranquilly asleep.

"*My* sort," said Mr. Polly.

He soon discovered that she was the landlady—a simple and kindly woman with a comfortable outlook on the world as God had made it for her. She wanted an odd man about the place, and Mr. Polly assured her that he was "odd all right," and inquired about the wages:

"Not much, but you get tips and pickings. I've a sort of feeling it would suit you."

"I've a sort of feeling it would. What's the duties? Fetch and carry? Ferry? Garden? Wash bottles? *Ceteris paribus?*"

"That's about it," said the fat woman.

"Give me a trial."

"You don't *look* a wrong 'un. 'Ave you been to prison?"

"Never."

"Nor a Reformatory? Nor any Institution?"

"Not me. Do I *look* reformed?"

"Can you paint and carpenter a bit?"

"Ripe for it."

"Have a bit of cheese?"

"If I might."

And the way she brought the cheese showed

Mr. Polly that the business was settled in her mind.

Before Mr. Polly became seized and possessed of the Potwell Inn he met with and fought bitter battles with the landlady's murderous nephew, who constantly extorted money from her, and terrified everybody in the place.

Uncle Jim had no stomach for cold water, and Mr. Polly having by some "strategious" moves driven him to the riverside, managed to hurl him in:

"Splash! Down he fell backwards into a frothing mass of water, with Mr. Polly jabbing at him. Under the water he turned round, and came up again, as if in flight towards the middle of the river. Directly his head reappeared, Mr. Polly had him between his shoulders and under again, bubbling thickly. A hand clutched and disappeared.

"It was stupendous! Mr. Polly had discovered the heel of Achilles."

This story of Mr. Polly is the book of a man to whom everything—everything in the world—is vividly interesting, the book of a man who can project his mind into just any odd place, plight or predicament—and get frolic and sport out of it. The private war between Mr. Polly and Uncle Jim for the possession of the Potwell Inn is rather an epic matter—an epic of our everyday life. Former ages lived in a lather of apprehension, knowing that death was always stalking

them and might swoop on them at any moment; in the dagger of the thief; in the unbridled pestilence; at the orders of the cruel overlord. But we—that is why Mr. Polly's joyous battles with the landlady's nephew are so gorgeous—hang on the chance assassin. And when the chance assassin happens to be a real human being like Uncle Jim, quite unlike the impossible and sinister fellows in the modern novels, we are mighty glad. And Wells has treated it with such breezy freedom. None of the gloom and fierce indignation of Dostoieffsky; none of the hopelessness of Gissing, nothing of the Kipling touch—the tricks of a decorator and colourman in words. Only just a story of a great fight told with a sort of honest, pleasant straightforwardness.

After having vanquished Uncle Jim, Mr. Polly was installed "for ever" and we discover him enthroned in a kind of solitary glory as the odd man and thrower-out of the Potwell Inn. Finally the place claims him utterly. The rooms of the old inn distil and drip with peace and repose; the sunsets lull Mr. Polly into a kind of wonderful state of exaltation. We leave Mr. Polly and the fat woman sitting beside one of the little green tables near the river on a serenely luminous evening:

"Whenever there's signs of a good sunset, and I'm not too busy," said Mr. Polly, "I'll come and sit out here."

The fat woman looked at him with eyes in which contentment struggled with some obscure reluctant protest, and at last turned them slowly to the black nettle pagodas against the golden sky.

"I wish we could," she said.

"I will."

The fat woman's voice sank nearly to the inaudible.

"Not always," she said.

Mr. Polly was some time before he replied.

"Come here always, when I'm a ghost," he replied.

"Spoil the place for others," said the fat woman, abandoning her moral solicitudes for a more congenial point of view.

"Not my sort of ghost wouldn't," said Mr. Polly, emerging from another long pause. "I'd be a sort of diaphalous feeling—just mellowish and warmish like . . . . "

They remain in the warm twilight, lost in a smooth, still tranquility. They are not so much thinking as feeling the intense wonderful knowledge of a great affection given and returned, a friendship that is too mysterious and perfect for words.

The progression of Mr. Polly suggests the progression of Wells in some respects. I hope this does not sound impertinent, for of course, I do not mean that Wells is a bit like Polly intellectually. But Polly is romantic, a poet

and a dreamer in the same way that Wells is. There are poets and poets, and they can be divided into two classes—one group that flourishes on the world within, the other whose poetry originates from knowledge and experience. One kind of imagination divines, the other discovers after much probing. One has pure perception; the other a genius for deductions. Into the latter class both Mr. Polly and Wells must be introduced, and assuredly they will find themselves in good company—that great band who have felt that "tearing hunger to do things." The men who could not be half-hearted. Rupert Brooke had the same attitude to life, and his declaration is worth quoting:

"I know what things are good; friendship and work and conversation. These I shall have." He tells of "that tearing hunger to do and do and do things. I want to walk 1,000 miles, and write 1,000 plays, and sing 1,000 poems, and drink 1,000 pots of beer, and kiss 1,000 girls, and—oh, a million things! . . . The spring makes me almost ill with excitement."

Mr. Sidney Dark, in his "Outline of H. G. Wells," says that the ideas of Mr. Polly suggest a succession of valuable discussions on life. His ideas are all full of knowledge and experience. His mind is keen and insistent, but just fails to be analytical. And Wells for once is content to leave the reader to explain the suggestions for himself. Polly moved Heaven and earth in

order to make his wife happy but failed, and we get the fruits of his eager mind:

"There's something that doesn't mind us," he resumed presently. "It isn't what we try to get that we get, it isn't the good we think we do is good. What makes us happy isn't our trying, what makes others happy isn't our trying. There's a sort of character people like, and stand up for, and a sort they won't. You got to work it out, and take the consequences . . . . Miriam was always trying."

Throughout "Mr. Polly" Wells allows the characters to have their full say in exactly their own way. We know this must have been an exceedingly difficult task for the author, for he has a tendency to leave his characters in the cold, while he has a "go" at Mr. Shaw, the Fabian Society, Cæsar, Napoleon, the "brass-hats" at the War Office, the Greek language or any other pet animosity. This philosophy of bitterness is one of his foibles.

Mr. E. T. Raymond well says of him*:

"Wells has been described as the sworn foe of Things as They Are. But not less remarkable is his detestation of Things as They Were. Things and men—for he has the rather rare capacity (Macaulay had it also in a lesser degree) of hating fiercely—as if they still lived next door—people whose dust has for ages mingled with the soil of far-distant lands.

* *John o'London's Weekly*, January 28th, 1922

"In the matter of Mr. Wells's animosities a thousand years are but as a day. He hates Constantine. He hates Cæsar and most of the Romans. He hates Alexander. He detests Demosthenes as he might 'Pertinax' to-day or Count Westarp the day before yesterday. The only 'old 'uns' (to quote Mr. Durdles) to whom he is any way partial are a few rather vague Chinamen and Indians. But chiefly he loathes a certain kind of early-Christian Father, represented by that 'little, red-haired, busy, wirepulling' person, whom the Church honours as Saint Athanasius.

"This animosity is the more remarkable—or perhaps the less—because Mr. Wells has himself more than a touch of Athanasius. He is quite as busy, just as interested in words and ideas, not more tolerant, and, when he waxes theological (as in 'The Invisible King'), not a whit more majestically unintelligible. Mr. Wells has all the dogmatism of Athanasius: he only lacks the dogma."

In "Mr. Polly" he resists all temptations to go for things till he has written 261 pages out of the 270. Then he succumbs. Mr. Polly thinks it disagreeable to think he has committed arson, because that kind of thing leads to the "lock-up." Otherwise Polly feels no remorse about it. Then Wells feels that the reader will say: "What a blackguard this fellow Polly is!" and he is immediately waving his shillelagh:

"Arson, after all, is an artificial crime. Some crimes are crimes in themselves, would be crimes without any law, the cruelties, mockery, the breaches of faith that astonish and wound, but the burning of things is in itself neither good nor bad. A large number of houses deserve to be burnt, most modern furniture, an overwhelming majority of pictures and books—one might go on for some time with the list. If our community was collectively anything more than a feeble idiot, it would burn most of London and Chicago, for example, and build sane and beautiful cities in the place of these pestilential heaps of rotten private property."

This tendency to go for things is certainly a weakness in Wells—but a very entertaining weakness; and it also shows a symptom of a Heaven-sent blessing, inasmuch that he is able to find plenty of diversion in this crooked, this irritating, this gloriously petulant old world of ours. The diverse ways in which great writers have tuned up their ideas are astonishing. Keats "doped" himself with red pepper. Dickens donned a new fancy waistcoat. Stevenson played the flute. Browning shuffled his feet till he wore a hole in the carpet, Longfellow walked about in the middle of the night (Wells is fond of this recreation, too) Hawthorn reads old newspapers; Lord de Tabley—like Mr. Polly—was always ready to watch sunsets. Swinburne was always longing for a second

glass of beer, but knew that it would send him to sleep. De Quincey gulped down eight thousand drops of laudanum—enough to poison, say, a whole company of Grenadiers. Dante Gabriel Rossetti took sixty grains of chloral every four hours. Coleridge wrote "Kubla Khan" on the juice of the poppy. Hawker wrote "And shall Trelawny die?" on opium. Poe's drunken bouts were responsible for "The Raven" and "The Bells." The delicate poetry of Dowson came from drugs. Defoe and Fielding drew a massive, patient energy from gout. And Wells—well, he goes out under the stars and indulges in a good "hate."

One could almost be led to assume that literature is the outcome of eccentricity. But it is not so. However, men and women with an abnormal desire to project their ideas are moved to enter a profession which, after all, is rather a succession of sensations than an occupation. The sand storm and tropical rain are abnormal, but surely as natural as the English shower or the sunshine. They are simply Nature's methods of putting things right. So, too, with our greatest thinkers, who bring through strange methods a new fragrance from the world invisible.

CHAPTER X

A Study in the Un-Moral

It is almost impossible to prophesy anything about the final beliefs of Wells. You might say that he will die a fierce Roman Catholic, or a Mormon, or that the fairies may pluck him by the hand and steal him away. His progressions have taken such extraordinary directions that the world now is prepared for anything he may say or do. And whatever cause he makes up his mind to champion he will take a vast number of converts with him. So skilled is he in the science of reasoning that you feel that he could make the most fantastic idea seem sane and moderate. He is always trying to prove that black is white, and incidentally justifying his arguments. In the secret places of his heart lurks an odd and mystical love of self-vivisection, and dwelling with that desire for a " vermin hunt in the old tenement " is the hot and eager resolve of defence. This is a quality which makes the reader break and pause and wonder where he stands with Wells. In " The Secret Places of the Heart " he is full of this tricky, gnomish argumentativeness, but his arguments fail to inspire. We feel that the middle-aged amorist of the story (Sir

Richmond Hardy) is not a man who really matters at all, but merely a shadow of a certain native of Seville—Don Juan by name. When we know how busy Sir Richmond has been all his life seeking love like an area sneak and neglecting the opulence of true manhood which is surely associated with simple things—with songs, horses, camp fires and companionship with other men—because a fumbling old fool, Mother Nature, insists on a new love affair every month, we have a very fair picture of a man following love as a pastime.

The whole book is an attempt to show that all love is full of monstrous cruelty. But nothing rings true in it. The love of Sir Richmond is cruel and brutish, but it is not the love that the world knows—the real, unsmirched, rare thing. Let him speak for himself:

"I've travelled much. I've organised great business developments. You might think that my time had been fairly well filled without much philandering. And all the time, all the time, I've been—about women—like a thirsty beast looking for water . . . . . Always. Always. All through my life."

Wells turns Sir Richmond out as a public-spirited, honourable man caught by an immense enthusiasm for his work on the Fuel Commission. He felt that if he could only stand up to his job he could beat the oil profiteers and financial adventurers. But that was where the Devil

came in. He found himself growing "slack and weak-willed and inaccurate . . . . . Sloppy . . . . . Indolent . . . . . Vicious."

His work has almost broken him and he finds his way to Dr. Martineau's consulting room, suffering from excessive mental and moral fatigue.

Dr. Martineau is not a man to use drugs—"we don't know how to use drugs," he objected—but he prescribes a casting out of devils from the dark alcoves of Sir Richmond's mind by a series of frank talks with his patient. It is to be three weeks of self-vivisection during which Sir Richmond is to be perfectly honest with himself and to hide nothing from the doctor. Martineau gives a passage from his unpublished book to illustrate the state of mind in which he finds his patient: "You are like someone who awakens out of an immemorial sleep to find himself in a vast chamber, in a great and ancient house . . . . in a sunless universe. You are not alone in it. . . . . Your leadership is disputed . . . . . ancient and discarded powers and purposes thrust ambiguous limbs and claws suddenly out of the darkness into the light of your attention. They snatch things out of your hand, trip your feet and jog your elbow. . . The souls of apes, reptiles and creeping things haunt the passages and attics and cellars of

this living house in which your consciousness has awakened. . ."

Martineau suggests a holiday jaunt into the west of England by motor car, and also an exploration of the secret places of Hardy's heart at the same time.

Sir Richmond Hardy stands for nothing in Wells's achievement save only for his power to create an illusion of reality and enthusiasm by sheer force of talking his way through brick walls. He is not a creation, and there is no sign that there is anything mystic or hidden in his whole being. In his boyhood he has worshipped various goddesses—first the white goddesses at the Crystal Palace, and later the blowzy goddesses that one may see bathing at Brighton during the summer months. He talks in this way:

"The women of my adolescent dreams were stripped and strong and lovely. They were great creatures. They came, it was clearly traceable, from pictures, sculpture—and from definite response in myself to their beauty. My mother had nothing whatever to do with that. The women and girls about me were fussy bunches of clothes that I am sure I never even linked with that dream world of love and beauty."

Yet we may note the skill with which Wells has concealed his failure. This book may be taken as a symbol of the distinction between

work produced in a hurry-skurry ram-you-damn-you fashion, and the work of pure inspiration. One could almost imagine that Wells is drawing the picture of some *very* dear friend—a second Sir Richmond Hardy—knowing all the time that he is a weak and selfish man and yet wishing to present him as a "great irresponsible genius." Take, for example, the pretence that Hardy is a "blend of Shelley and Godwin . . . the sort of man who needs women to complete himself, but for whom his work is always more important."*

Hardy is really nothing of the kind. Wells only assumes it, makes one or two of the other people in the story assume it, and expects his readers to swallow his gilded pill without further question. Hardy is unfaithful to his wife up hill and down dale, and it is rather hard to forgive him in the face of her trusting and perplexed loyalty to him. He is also in a slight entanglement, at the time of the motor tour, with an intellectually brilliant woman, Martin Leeds, who "amused him immensely." She was clever, helpless and headlong. And so this witty, handsome genius, whom Hardy impudently refers to as "a mistress of mine," is left with a child, and the hero refers to this complication as a thing which "just happened"—one of those little oversights which did not matter one way or the other.

* *The Weekly Westminster Gazette*, May 20th, 1922

At the time of Hardy's consultation with Dr. Martineau, Martin Leeds has got "something disfiguring, something nobody else could ever have or think of having, called *carbuncle.* Carbuncle! . . . a perfectly aimless, useless, useless illness—and as painful as it can be," and will not allow Hardy to visit her or the child. This is an excuse for Hardy to break out in an explosive and self-indulgent plea that the greater the faults of the philanderer, the greater are the powers given to him to make reparation for the harm that is done.

"Without women I am a wasting fever of distressful toil. Without them there is no kindness in existence, no rest, no sort of satisfaction."

Martin Leeds was separated from him, but Hardy could not live on the deadly level of everyday life for long. He craved for fluctuations, variety and vivid impressions, and soon found them in Miss Grammont — Oil-king Grammont's daughter—and her companion, Belinda Scyffert. V. V. Grammont is no vain, trifling woman, but she has tasted of the bitter-sweetness of love too, not so deeply as Hardy, owing to her youth. Miss Grammont went to France with an American hospital and was rather alarmed at first by the war-time atmosphere, which to say the least was rather heedless of Mrs. Grundy. "There was death everywhere and people snatched at gratifications

. . . . a kind of wildness got into the blood." However, she met one of her lovers in France—Caston, "a very rotten sort of man" who made "to-morrow we'll die" an excuse for planning a three days' stay in Paris with her, after which her name became soiled with scandal—which was not to be removed. V. V. in her confidences tells Hardy: "All sorts of people know about it . . . . we went very far."

Of course Hardy falls head over heels in love with her, and wakes out of an extraordinary dream, saying: "There is no other marriage than the marriage of true minds," which is rather a useful excuse for moonlight philandering. He sees her "kind, faintly smiling face . . . My dear wife and mate" he is saying, and kissing her cool lips.

Hardy's dream is converted into the tangibility of a real love meeting with V. V. in which she declares she loves him with all her heart. The doctor tries to prevent Hardy in his "blind drive to get hold of and possess" V. V., and the pale ghost of Martin Leeds haunts him: "You have nothing to give her but stolen goods," she says. "You have nothing to give anyone personally any more. . . ."

Hardy struggles to escape from his passion for V. V. and comes to a decision that there is nothing else in the world to do but for them to part at once, and so the affair ends.

". . . . . And I will go back to dear old Martin. . . . . I'll be kind to her and tell her her carbuncle scar rather becomes her. . . And in a little while I shall be altogether in love with her again. . ."

But even to the last chapter Sir Richmond is rather interesting—but only interesting by the fact that he hangs desperately to the spontaneousness of Wells's fountain pen, but the reader cannot believe that his love for V. V. was the authentic thing in spite of the author's sudden move up the scale of excellence in a moonlight scene at Chepstow.

To sum the matter up, Sir Richmond is one of a not very rare class of men in London to-day —he is a follower of girls. It is all nonsense to say that such men are as other men. They are a race apart. Their perverseness is inherent and ancestral, and they all have their beginnings in the same way as Sir Richmond—" with a girl who runs out of a tent . . . dressed in a tight bathing dress . . . the loveliest, most shapely thing. . ."

The Press has taken Wells to task very severely over the " secret places " of the heart of Sir Richmond Hardy with his cool, calculating, conscienceless character. Edith Shackleton asks " Is Mr. Wells a Public Danger ? " (*Daily Sketch*, May 15th, 1922) :

" Are creative, brilliant young women really only good for the temporary slaking of the

desires of inferior men ? Should we be improving the world by strewing it with a generation of children who don't know to whom they belong, and are mere nuisances and complications to those to whom they have 'just happened' ?

"'Desire,' pleads Sir Richmond, 'has never been the chief incentive of my relations with women. Never. So far as I can analyse the thing, it has been a craving for a particular sort of life-giving companionship.'

"And so when the latest love has to leave him he murmurs to her 'Heart's delight . . . Priestess of life . . . Divinity'—and then turns his car round and rushes off to Martin Leeds.

"He can analyse it and call it by what conceit, soothing names he likes, but to decent men and women this is not the recreative love which modern writers seem to think they have discovered (but which William Blake, among others, knew something about some generations ago). It is the beastliness which is a sort of blasphemy, since it degrades one human being to the mere use of another.

"Sir Richmond and his doctor make moral hash of Maidenhead during their journey together. They decide that the hotel is primarily a shelter for 'temporary' honeymooners, that the ruling interests of the place are 'love, largely illicit, and persistent drinking.'

"Even if this is true of Maidenhead (and

a chorus of denial has already arisen), it is not true that the Thames is smudged in this way from end to end.

"It bears men who are something more than 'thirsty beasts,' men who can even look on their wives with interest and respect. More than that it bears strenuous boys and girls, who have not 'just happened,' and who are being reared in love and security.

"They would not be there, those boys and girls, if philandering were the main occupation of the adult nation. We shouldn't be able to afford them.

"Mr. Wells should go up the river again."

Another critic has written:

"After perusing this latest effusion of Wells, it would really seem that he—not alone amongst our modern writers—would have us believe that this good world of ours is peopled with folk to whom Sex is the all-pervading *motif* in life. Does Mr. Wells realize that to the vast majority of healthy, clean-living individuals it is only an incident, and to most a romantic happy incident of their own making, in the common round of business and pleasure that goes to make up their lives? Let him, as Edith Shackleton suggests, 'go up the river again,' and what will he find: Laughter, fun and glorious exercise. Doubtless, as evening falls with its romantic whispers on the soft river atmosphere, Mother Nature is responsible for

a closer community between man and maid, but not entirely in the coarse animal sense a study of Mr. Wells's latest hero would suggest.

"No, let us get away from this eternal 'consulting-room-cum-operating-theatre' aspect of sex matters so prevalent under the lead of Wells and others in our current literature and get back to the fine studies of life's problems we were accustomed to enjoy in the novels of Meredith, Dickens and Thackeray, to mention only a few of our really great writers."

The *Westminster Gazette* in its issue of May 29th, 1922, under the heading "Don Juan again," said:

"If the book has any moral at all, or any meaning, it is surely that a sensuous egotist like Richmond Hardy only turns to his sham scientific generalisations, his wild historical theories, because he has failed so miserably with the small, important things. There is something suspect about the man who talks of Planets and Women and Desire; he is generally the man who cannot even content his wife, or bring up his children."

Perhaps there is more of poison than of perfection in "The Secret Places of the Heart," and one finds an echo of Wilde's favourite saying, "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it." Anyway, Sir Richmond is one of those men who thinks it's too bad he has to be good, but he has little humour in him. He does not stride ahead mightily; in fact we must confess that he

is a loquacious fellow at times. He is not Rabelaisian with the big broad laugh—a man who can lie down with pariahs, and yet rise out of the swill and husks with a great and mighty arrogance. But we must not confuse the artist with the subject matter. Wells has placed Sir Richmond before us as a character, and virtue or wickedness is not a matter for discussion here. He sees he can produce a certain artistic effect by making Sir Richmond a man who thinks "that virtue in woman is a tremendous handicap," and he tries to produce it.

Sir Richmond will be to each reader what he is himself.

CHAPTER XI

"The Passionate Friends"

"The Passionate Friends" is a day-dream; it is rather the outline of a life that Wells would have liked to have passed through than the life—splendid enough in all conscience—that he has lived. The malicious spirit of caricature is not so evident in this book. There is a new note in it—a difference. His not too compassionate nature turns to imagining instead of remembering past bitterness, and this is where the poet conquers the man with a grievance. The book pretends to be a father's advice to a son, so that he may be understood and known by that son, as his father has never been understood and known by him.

"Why must we all repeat things done, and come again very bitterly to wisdom our fathers have achieved before us? My grandfather there should have left me something better than the still enigma of his watching face. All my life so far has gone in learning very painfully what many men have learnt before me; I have spent the greater part of forty years in finding a sort of purpose for the uncertain and declining decades that remain. Is it not time the generations drew together and helped one another? Cannot

we begin now to make a better use of the experiences of life so that our sons may not waste themselves so much—cannot we gather into books that men may read in an hour or so the gist of these confused and multitudinous realities of the individual career ? "

The story of love that is friendship and friendship that is love makes the theme of the book. The heroine, Lady Mary Christian, has to make her choice between love in an undignified poverty for which all her training has unfitted her, and a sterile ease and magnificence that gives her those advantages which her temperament and education require. The impecunious lover is Stephen Stratton (the autobiographer in this case) and the wealthy suitor is Justin whom she marries. Thus she chooses the millionaire because on her own confession she wanted a great house, a great position, and space and freedom. Steve Stratton and Mary have been lovers from childhood, and we are given to understand from the moment of their first frank kisses that it is the real thing—love, immense, steady, enduring. Some people think there isn't such a thing as the love of Mary for Stratton which Wells has weaved into this story. There is. But it's rare, as rare as a perfect greyhound or a flawless pearl. Such love as that of Lady Mary must always be rare, it's too singular to be anything but the rarest ; it's the most intricate thing in the world. Think of it for a moment. Here we see Lady

Mary Christian full of that real mysterious passion for Stratton, but stubbornly refusing to give herself to his keeping for fear that she should become " just usual and familiar " to him in the end.

Mary says : " I don't want to become some one's certain possession . . . . To you least of all. Don't you see ? I want to be wonderful to you, Stevenage, more than to any one. I want—I want always to make your heart beat faster. I want always to be coming to you with my own heart beating faster. Always and always I want it to be like that."

Steve wanted only one thing—the woman he loved, the woman who fitted into every need of his being, but he was not content to stay at home and allow his imagination to torment him with thoughts of Justin as the perpetual privileged wooer. Mary having made her choice, finds herself entirely bankrupt in happiness, and is tempted to grasp at love again when Steve returns home from the South African War of 1899-1901.

* * * *

About this time Steve is taken over to Ridinghanger, a house about twelve miles from his father's home, by a friend with a motor-car. Here he is attracted by Rachel More—" a tall, slender, brown haired " girl with very still, deep dark eyes.

Steve makes no secret of the interest he finds in Rachel, and her parents make none of their

entire approval of him as a suitor. However, he does not make love to Rachel, but it is always in his mind that he will make love to her. They both know, deep down in their hearts, that they have given their vows without actually having made any allusion to such a thing.

Of course Mary and Steve meet again and the old desire flames up still more fiercely. Steve is for making an open and defiant business of their love, but Mary hesitates. She wishes it to be secret. She wants to keep Steve—perhaps she is moved to become his mistress because she wishes to keep him. But she also wishes to keep everything else in life, her freedom, wealth and social rank. And the cruelty of it is that Mary really believes that she is doing the right thing. So for a time Steve serves the secrecy of their transgressions—lies, agrees to false addresses, pretends and sinks to the level of a furtive, slinking, half-hearted wooer. The lovers become, in Wells's words, "people who are not clean and scandalous, but immoral and respectable." Steve is a daylight man, and his whispering love with flushed cheeks is not what he wants. It tortures him. Some people would say that Mary got on his nerves. It's a good enough description. When he looks into Mary's patient, mysterious eyes the old light is no longer there. From the moment when they become lovers in the narrower meaning of the word, all the gold and magic of their love turns to dross, and they no longer have

the real beauty and delight of one another. Discovery of their secret love soon follows.

Steve pays a visit to Lady Mary with some book as a pretext; the servant tells him that Lady Justin awaits him in her parlour. He walks in, opening the door softly, and as she sits with her back to him, bends to kiss her. Justin, her husband, is standing on the terrace, staring at them.

"I felt this was going on," says Justin, and turning to his wife, "yet somehow it seemed wrong and unnatural to think such a thing of you."

After the discovery of their hidden love Stephen thinks there is only one thing to do. He declares that Mary is his wife "in the sight of God" and that now she must be inevitably his. They must escape together. But his valiant demands that she must face the world with him alone are repudiated both by Mary and Justin, her husband. Mary is emphatic on the point; and makes this extravagant claim:

"I want neither of you. I want myself. I'm not a thing. I'm a human being. I'm not your thing, Justin—nor yours, Stephen. Yet you want to quarrel over me—like two dogs over a bone. I am going to stay here—in my house! It's my home. I made it. Every room of it is full of me. Here I am!"

The strain of these troublous days is too much for Mary and she breaks down in health.

Stratton meets her again later, and sees that she is really ill and broken. She can no longer think of eloping with him. The edge is off her pluck. Besides, Justin has changed suddenly and feels cheated. He threatens to fling Mary and Stratton " into the ditch together " unless all his commands are followed with passive obedience. Stratton finds himself up against the law, up against social tradition, up against money, and realizes that he cannot hope to fight these powerful factors with any hope of success. He gives in to Justin's terms, which required that he would leave England for three years, and promise not to meet nor to correspond with Mary afterwards.

* * * *

Wells has persistently suggested that the man does not suffer in the same degree as the woman, and here we have one more instance. When Stafford is thwarted he fills his life with a great scheme of helping people to a better understanding by spreading and collating knowledge. He becomes a publisher of the best literary productions of the world in standardized cheap editions. That is his escape from the wickedness of things, but Lady Mary is left socially and economically shackled. And incidentally Stafford's escape gives Wells a chance to make a wonderful survey of what may be called the world of economics. Very vivid, too, is his explanation of one of the great puzzles of political and social history—the dominant

English official of the East. In the earlier chapters of this book the making of an English gentleman is described. We have every phase of the process told with a realism that gives one in a flashlight a sort of composite picture of the whole aristocratic young manhood of England. Steve Stratton, in his vicarage home, has his tutor—the Rev. Mr. Siddons: "Do not commit yourself hastily to opinions, Steve, but once you have done so 'stick' to them. The world would far rather have a firm man wrong than a weak man hesitatingly right." "Institutions are more important than views," "Discursiveness ruins a man. Choose your goal and press to it" were some of Mr. Siddons' pronouncements.

Wells is writing of those dead little days when the English were much more envious of German progress than they were anxious to put their back to the wall and contest it. It was then looked upon as dishonest for any other nation to copy the manufacture of our solid and sacred English goods. Our sons were taught that any Englishman was worth a round half-dozen Germans in a fight, and read a philosophy that was more like the defensive plating of a battleship than a form of pure education—of this protective philosophy Wells has written:

"The stuff was administered with a mysterious gilding of Greek and reverence, old Hegel's monstrous web was the ultimate modernity, and Plato, that intellectual journalist-artist,

that bright, restless experimentalist in ideas, was, as it were, the god of wisdom, only a little less omniscient (and on the whole more of a scholar and a gentleman) than the God of fact."

It was this training which gave length without breadth to the youthful vision which made the Lady Mary beg of her lover:

"Whatever you become, you promise and swear here and now never to be grey and grubby, never to be humpy and snuffy, never to be respectable and modest, and dull, and a little fat—like everybody."

Then Steve is sent to Harbury, a fine old English school where his bracing-up, hardening, and encrusting is continued. The purpose of the school's methods was to leave every boy with the faith: "We were Anglo-Saxons, the elect of the earth, leading the world in social organisation, in science and economic method. In India and the East particularly we were the apostles of even-handed justice, relentless veracity, personal cleanliness and modern efficiency."

Wells shows us the type of men this school training produces—men of mediocre intelligence, yet men of imagination and obstinate will:

"I think we are an imaginative people with an imagination at once gigantic, heroic and shy, and also we are a strangely restrained and disciplined people who are yet neither subdued nor subordinated. . . . These are flat con-

tradictions to state, and yet how else can one explain the paradox of the English character, and this spectacle of a handful of mute, snobbish, not obviously clever and quite obviously ill-educated men holding together kingdoms, tongues and races, three hundred millions of them, in a restless, fermenting peace ? "

Some very shrewd hits are made regarding the " awfulness " of ill-fitting clothing which places the offender outside the pale of any common humanity. At least that is the opinion pronounced by Steve's tutor. To be sure, the consciousness of having a suit cut by one of the best Bond Street tailors lends to the English youth who is alive to good and bad " form " a peace which religion cannot give. Perhaps much of the sustaining peace that comes to people in church may be due to their best clothes ! There is really much to be said in favour of the strict ritual and proper methods of wearing clothes.

Towards the end of the book Stratton meets Rachel again at Boppard in a little garden under the very shadow of the cathedral at Worms. Stratton is now a lonely man and is strongly moved to make her an offer of marriage. But with the pale shadow of Mary ever haunting him he felt that it was all but impossible to make love naturally to Rachel. He did not see how he could even *write* a love letter to her. However, he is passionately anxious not to lose

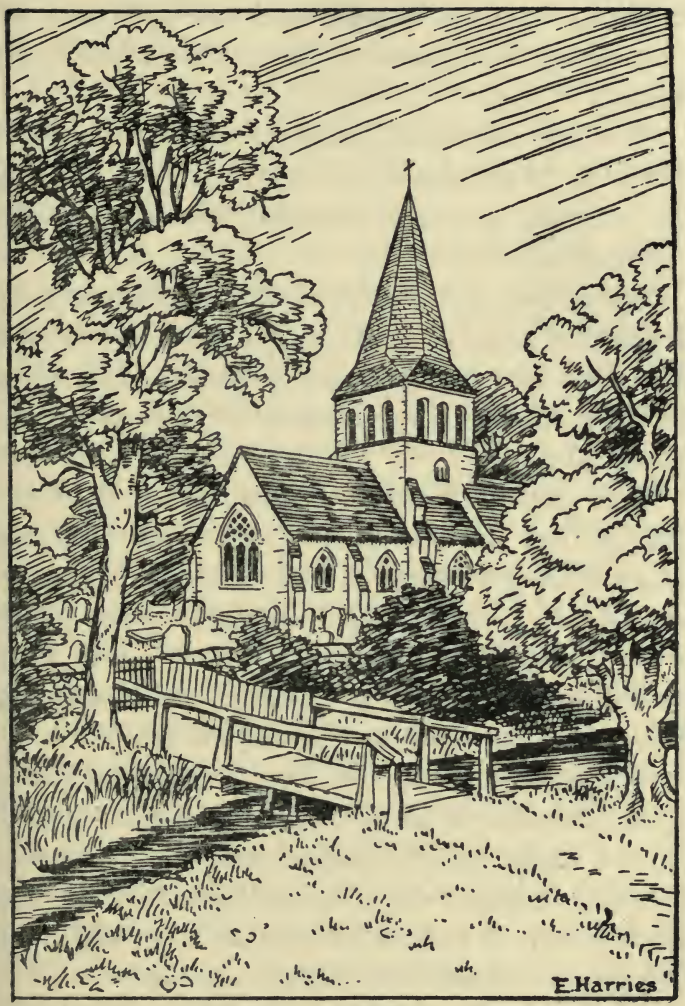
her. At last he sends her an offer of marriage by cable—a terse business-like message, and receives her answer in the single word "Yes," thus being paid back in his own coin.

After this Stratton searches the corners of his heart and finds that he is really in love with Rachel and has been for some years. But he has always been determined to be fair even at the price of losing her. Thus he would never use a phrase of endearment to her for fear it should not come from his innermost self. But it was with a great perplexity that he discovered Mary still held a place in his love—it was deep-rooted and eternally green, this love for Mary.

Stratton hurries home to Surrey to meet Rachel, and finds her waiting for him—bright-eyed and resolute—in his father's study. They are married in the little church at Shere.

One morning at the breakfast-table Stratton picks up an envelope and sees the half-forgotten and infinitely familiar handwriting of Lady Mary Justin. . . . . The sight of it gives him an odd mixture of sensations. He is startled, disturbed, almost afraid. His love for Mary has not healed, it has only skinned over. It needs but such a touch as this to tell him how little he has forgotten her.

In this letter the reader gathers that Stratton and Lady Mary both have children of their own now, but the main point of the letter is a passionate declaration by Lady Mary that she



Shere Church

is still true to Stratton—" you are my brother, Stephen, and my friend and my twin and the core of my imagination; fifty babies cannot alter that."

The last meeting between Stephen and Lady Mary takes place at a small inn at Engstlen Alp. It is quite a chance meeting arranged by the cruel Fates.

Lady Mary thinks that God Himself has given them this one chance for a long talk, but Stephen is not so sure of God's participation, and wishes to leave the inn immediately to save any odour of scandal.

Says Lady Mary: "You take the good things God sends you as I do. You stay and talk with me now, before the curtain falls again. . . . Go easy, Stephen, old friend. . . . My dear, my dear! . . . . Have you forgotten? Is it possible for you to go mute with so much that we can say?"

Stephen naturally decides to stay, and they spend the rest of the day in earnest conversation. It is a happy and blameless meeting for them—a cool, steady day of friendship with nothing at the end of it to be regretted. A week later a telegram came from Paris:

"Come back at once to London. Justin has been told of our meeting, and is resolved upon divorce."

Back in London Stephen came face to face with his solicitor.

"You spent the night in adjacent rooms," he says to Stephen drily. . . . . "Didn't you know?"

Stephen tries to explain that he met Lady Mary at breakfast, and until that moment he had not the faintest idea of her being at Engstlen, much less at the inn.

But the solicitor is an unprincipled wine-sodden man himself, and cannot bring himself to believe Stephen's account of the meeting. "No jury on earth is going to believe you didn't know," he says. "Why, no man on earth is going to believe a yarn like that."

Indeed it was only too self-evident that Justin would have no difficulty in getting a divorce.

Then Mary came to Stephen and told him there would be no divorce. At first it does not sink into his mind that Mary means to take her own life in order to stamp out the disgrace of a public examination of their past and present friendship. Later, torn by intolerable distresses and anxiety, he races to the house she occupies with the intention of making a last appeal to her to live—if it is suicide she contemplates. But he arrives too late. Lady Mary has paid the reckoning with her own life.

CHAPTER XII

Wells Among the Literary Lions

It will perhaps be well to look a little closely at the ideas of our author as compared with the ideas of some of the foremost literary men of his period. This will help us to estimate not so much the form and quality of his literary cunning, as his temperament and politics. First of all a comparison with Hilaire Belloc should bring out a few of the most salient points in the Wellsian creed. Like Wells, Belloc finds the present conditions of the civilized world intolerable and demands a fresh beginning. But he differs from the other writer in this, that while he thinks that science narrows rather than increases the harmony of the world, Wells thinks that each fresh discovery is bringing the world slowly forward towards a dimly discerned Utopia. To Belloc each fresh discovery only helps to separate man from the primal needs of his nature. He would endeavour not to advance with the men who can work scientific miracles, but to get back to the men who *knew* that such miracles were not good for the soul. Perhaps, after all, Belloc's Utopia is saner and more in keeping with the foolishness and ruggedness of mankind. Wells has set up the ideal of a

finer civilisation, of splendid cities, open ways and a more bountiful life than that in which men are now moiling and toiling; an ideal that is far too perfect for even a super-man like Wells himself. I am taking him on his own valuation too. In the preface to the 1914 edition of "Anticipations," he writes: "An occasional turn of harshness and moments of leaping ignorance are in the blood of H. G. Wells"—truly traits of character which would be most calamitous in the smooth working of his World State. Wells always fails to allow for the divine truculence of mankind, while on the other hand Belloc builds his central message upon it.

"Thus," he says in "The Path to Rome," "one should from time to time hunt animals, or at the very least shoot at a mark; one should always drink some kind of fermented liquor with one's food—and especially deeply on great feast days; one should go on the water from time to time; and one should dance on occasions; and one should sing in chorus. For all these things man has done since God put him in a garden and his eyes first became troubled with a soul."

So we find that the difference between the two men is very clear and separate. In Belloc's attitude towards religion he places himself still further from Wells. To Belloc the Catholic Church is the perpetual light of the world—it is the impregnable fortress of the ages,

buttressed about with all great and noble saints, against which the futile schemes of wicked men are dashed to nothingness. To him the faith is his mother, his father, his Aunt Matilda and his very lovable Uncle Bob who has a great capacity for beer and wine and chicken-pie; it is his wife and he attacks it with homely chaff; it is his life and he lives for it. The Catholic Church is irrevocable and unchangeable—the same yesterday, to-day, and for evermore.

To Wells this is just as senseless as the fetish worship of the African negroes. Some interesting disclosures at a Church Guild supper in 1908 will give some idea regarding his religious instincts.

"With the utmost consistency," he confessed, "for five and twenty years I hated the Church of England."

Brought up a son of the Church, he began at a comparatively early age to develop a very considerable scepticism about its formulæ. He became a teacher in a Church of England endowed school, and was later informed that if he wished to retain the post he must be confirmed. The choice lay, practically, between earning his own living and being maintained for a time by a hard-working mother.

"The result was," he said, "that I committed the first humiliating act of my life. I ate doubt and was confirmed—and lost my personal honour. The Church thus presented

itself to me for long as a great stupid thing, which was stifling my conscience and intelligence. I continued to hate it, somewhat without reason and justice, as I have since come to think."

He went on to urge that the Church of England should make far greater efforts to seize and hold the doubts that attack its position, instead of, as at present, simply pushing them away with its flat hands. He believed that it might be possible for a broadened Church, a Church not afraid of intelligence and thought and lucid explanation, so to alter its formulæ as to make it possible for the proud, unruly, inspired intelligence of those growing up to remain within it, as more or less difficult, perhaps, but essentially faithful servants.

Wells, in short, has a cheerful contempt for all that is pedantic and magisterial in religion. In the same way he is lawless and contemptuous of the ancient simplicity of our fathers. But Belloc sees no hope for mankind unless we return to primal things:

> They say that in the unchanging place,
> Where all we loved is always dear,
> We meet our morning face to face,
> And find again our twentieth year . .
>
> They say (and I am glad they say),
> It is so; and it may be so:
> It may be just the other way,
> I cannot tell. But this I know!
>
> From quiet homes and first beginning,
> Out to the undiscovered ends,
> There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
> But laughter and the love of friends.

But it must be understood that Wells is no pretender to false saintliness. Belloc says: "Wine, women, song and religious fervour." Wells crosses the religious fervour out. When the world pipes to him he is willing to dance with the maddest, even with G. K. Chesterton. There is quite a red-blooded Rabelaisian flavour in "The New Machiavelli," and its author is certainly determined to give vice a chance to parade in an alluring guise. He probably, however, retorts that he paints vice as it is—"paints the thing as he sees it," as Kipling would say.

"When we form that League of Social Science we were talking about" (said Remington's friend, Willersley) "chastity will be first among the virtues prescribed." "I shall form a rival league," I said, a little damped. "I'm hanged if I give up a single desire in me until I know why."

It is inevitable that a comparison should be made with Rudyard Kipling. But it need only be a very brief one, and at that only a comparison of literary skill of the two writers. The difference in their politics is as wide as the world, and there is no need to comment on it. With Wells the craft of letters counts for very little. Punctiliousness in literary criticism has never worried him in any way. Ford Madox Hueffer has said that he "writes without the help of any æsthetic laws." To Henry James his style

was appalling, and he remarked "its weakness and looseness, the utter going by the board of every self-respect of composition and expression." Mr. Sidney Dark finds many passages in his work that are "unreal and sentimental,"* and shows how he not infrequently gives himself away. This literary clumsiness is a demonstration of the temperamental difference between Rudyard Kipling and Wells. Kipling is a man of letters; Wells is a man of ideas. Kipling lives by the word alone—the word carefully selected, polished and set, and is a mere artist. Wells is more concerned with the projectile than with the artistic execution of the gun that fires it. Kipling is an extremely skilful literary jeweller, and the majority of people who read his books never realize this fact. Tales which appear to come out of the very soil itself, tales which are so rich and loamy that one is tempted to forget that Kipling is a literary man at all, come really out of Kipling's book-lined, perfectly appointed study at Burwash. The expert craftsman in him is very evident in such a story as "Friendly Brook," in which he works out a theme that we are vassals of the land, and that the land is very wise and knows those who are worthy and honest of intention. A drunken blackguard from London makes periodical visits to a small Sussex farmer in order to extort money from him. The farmer is content to leave the "land"

* "The Outline of Wells" (Leonard Parsons), 1922

to deal with this blackmailer, and sure enough a brook in flood clutches at "Mary's London father" in its swishing course and casts him lifeless back to land again:

"'Well, well! Let be how 'twill, the brook was a good friend to Jim. I see it now. I allus *did* wonder what he was gettin' at when he said that, when I talked to him about shiftin' the stack. 'You dunno everythin',' he ses. 'The brook's been a good friend to me,' he ses, 'an' if she's minded to have a snatch at my hay, I ain't settin' out to withstand her.'"

In this story Kipling attracted the reader's attention by literary cunning, by style, and by imagination—a combination which is not too often met with in a Wells story.

At first blush one may think there are many points of resemblance between Wells and Bernard Shaw. Indeed there are a great number of points of resemblance, and I have it on the highest authority that both writers are excessively fond of pickled cabbage. Shaw has told me too that he shares Wells's Socialist principles, and is favourably impressed with the creative effort of the Bolshevik Government just as Wells has been impressed.

But between the two there is a gateless barrier. Shaw is a mystic—the very antithesis of the cut-and-dried science of Wells. All Shaw's references to scientific pretensions are full of derision. Cecil Chesterton has written:

"He once proposed, I remember, to give astronomers in their calculation of distances a limit of a hundred and fifty miles, 'beyond which I refuse to credit any of their fairy-tales.' 'Impostor for impostor,' he added, 'I prefer the mystic to the scientist, the man who at least has the decency to call his nonsense a mystery to him who pretends that it is ascertained, weighed, measured, analysed fact.'

"All this is puzzling to the modern world. It cannot place G.B.S. It finds a man attacking current religious conceptions and puts him down as a 'rationalist.' It finds a man attacking science and calls him a 'reactionary obscurantist.' It finds a man who spares neither and comes to the conclusion that he must be a humorist, and so dismisses him—it being the modern view that a humorist cannot possess a soul to be saved. But the Middle Ages would have understood. They would have recognised in him at once the then quite common type of the Heretical Mystic. In the Thirteenth Century, Mr. Shaw would not have been laughed at. He would have been seriously, respectfully and intelligently burnt."

Mr. Sidney Dark, in his finished and stimulating "Outline of H. G. Wells," has also directed attention to several other fundamental differences between Wells and Shaw. First he points out that while Wells is an adventurer always striking new trails, Shaw is a fixture. Shaw was always crafty and always wise, it is true, but he has not moved

forward with the times. Shaw is not an improving thinker, and he has not yet contrived to fit his ideas in with 1914 circumstances. Mr. Dark very fitly brands Shaw as a philosophic Bourbon. This rather recalls the dictum of Hazlitt that an improving author is never a great author. But Wells grows every day, and he assuredly has the most progressive intelligence of all the men now engaged in novel-writing. The war has caused him to think out everything afresh, while it has suggested nothing to Shaw, but the fact that the world is full of fools just as he has always hinted.

Shaw is a Puritan. Wells loves life over-well; is a lusty, joyous, wholesome man with a marked appreciation of the Rabelaisian spirit.

Of Shaw, Cecil Chesterton has written:

"The fact is that Mr. Shaw is and always has been, as he himself has said, a Puritan. He has the true Puritan's scorn for 'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life.' He eats no meat. He drinks no wine. He does not smoke. He aims at a fierce intellectual asceticism, at a sort of virginity of the senses. Hence, I think, comes that half uncanny detachment which at once attracts and repels us. His eyes may see the clearer for these things, but they cut him off from much that is vital to the fellowship of men."

"Impostor for impostor, I prefer the mystic to the scientist."—BERNARD SHAW

CHAPTER XIII

"Love and Mr. Lewisham"

In the year 1900 Wells had already touched many worlds in his writings. On the heels of "The Invisible Man," "The War of the Worlds," "When the Sleeper Wakes"—afterwards published in 1911, revised and altered, as "The Sleeper Awakes"—and "Tales of Space and Time" came his novel "Love and Mr. Lewisham," and here again he introduces the reader to a world almost as unknown as those he previously evolved from his own imagination. The group of lively human figures which move in the central two hundred pages of this book belong to the world of South Kensington students, and into that strange and somewhat sordid background he weaves the poetry of life and the beauty of human love.

In the first chapter we are introduced to young Mr. Lewisham, who is an assistant master in the Whortley Proprietary School, with wages of forty pounds a year, out of which he has to pay fifteen shillings a week to lodge at a little shop in West Street. Lewisham is what is known as a nice ambitious young man. Motherly old ladies would say, "What a nice sincere young fellow!" In reading the first four pages of the book the

reader cannot fail to know that his life so far has been blameless. He is a passable-looking youngster of eighteen, with pleasant expression, and a quite unnecessary pair of glasses on a fairly prominent nose (he wears these to hide his youthful looks, that discipline may be maintained.)

At this time Lewisham is bubbling over wth enthusiasm, and his determination to gain knowledge is like a devouring flame. In his "Schema" he has arranged to take his B.A. degree at the London University, with "Hons. in all subjects"; a gold medal, write pamphlets in the Liberal interest, acquire six languages by the time he is four-and-twenty. The author very shrewdly remarks that there will be modifications of this "Schema" as experience widens, and before many pages are turned the modifications are very much in evidence.

Oho! little did we know of Lewisham when we called him a nice quiet young man, for soon we are to learn that he is just as headstrong, headlong and venturesome as it is possible for a lad to be. One Ethel—she is a figure of health and lightness with hazel eyes—drifts into Lewisham's careful and studious life, and in a very short time makes hay of the elaborate arrangements which have been forenamed on the "Schema." A chance meeting with this young lady in an avenue of ancient trees in Whortley Park leaves Lewisham with

a curious restlessness, which crystallizes out in a few days into the wonderful discovery that he is in love. And it is also to be remarked that when Lewisham catches a glance from Ethel in church he is seized with an absurd and powerful shyness, so that even the word "LOVE" in a simple and popular hymn is enough to cause a succession of blushes to chase across his youthful features.

Mr. George Bonover, head-master of Whortley Grammar School, objects very strongly to promiscuous meetings between Ethel and his young unmarried junior master, and makes his distaste for such intimacy quite clear to Lewisham. Moreover, the head-master openly questions him about Ethel, and with a curious spirit of opposition Lewisham tries to parry Bonover's inquisitiveness with several very deficient lies.

After this slight friction with Bonover things were difficult, but not impossible. Bonover loomed like a thunder-cloud for four days, and then proffered the olive branch to his assistant master. Asking a favour was the autocratic way Bonover had of hinting that any delinquency had been overlooked, and he came to Lewisham on a certain afternoon with a request that he would take "duty" in the cricket field instead of Dunkerley, the senior assistant master. Now it so happened that Lewisham had made up his mind to spend a wonderful afternoon with

Ethel, and he bluntly refused to oblige his "head" by taking on extra duty.

Here we are left with a mental picture of Bonover retreating full of enraged astonishment, and Lewisham standing white and stiff, full of wonder at his own extraordinary recklessness.

Lewisham's Saturday afternoon meeting with Ethel brought them near to conclusive decisions. The stiffness of their former encounters altogether vanished at the end of an hour. They were both in a highly electrical state, finding the whole world rose-coloured. She was at her prettiest, and didn't care for anything else in the world. And their Saturday afternoon ramble which should have terminated at four o'clock became a scandalous moonlight love affair.

It was after they left Immering that this ramble, properly speaking, became scandalous. "The sun was already a golden ball above the blue hills in the west—it turned our two young people into little figures of flame—and yet, instead of going homeward, they took the Wentworth road that plunges into the Forshaw Woods. Behind them the moon, almost full, hung in the blue sky above the tree-tops, ghostly and indistinct, and slowly gathered to itself such light as the setting sun left for it in the sky."

"Going out of Immering, they began to talk of the future. And for the very young lover there is no future but the immediate future."

When at last the lovers came down the long

road into Whortley it was quite dark, and Lewisham realized that he should have taken "duty" at evening preparation. This fact is vividly brought home to him by the sight of Mr. Bonover (framed and glazed by the gas-lit schoolroom window) acting as a deputy for his aberrant junior master.

Monday dawned coldly and clearly—"a Herbert Spencer of a day," Wells remarks—and Lewisham has an interview with Bonover in which he receives a formal intimation that his services will not be needed after the end of the next term.

At this point Ethel leaves Whortley for her home in London and the reader of this story, like Lewisham, hears no more of her for some years.

After this there is an interval of two years and a half, and the story resumes with a much maturer Mr. Lewisham—a Socialist and a man with quite a modest reputation as a promising student at the National School of Science, where he has been fortunate enough to obtain free instruction and a guinea a week.

One of the students at the Normal School is a grizzled little old man, reputed to be rich, and by name known as Lagune. He is an ardent spiritualist and it comes about that Lewisham and his sceptical friend Smithers consent to witness a spirit-raising at his house. At the séance Lewisham meets a plausible and able

H. G. Wells, 1901

rogue, Chaffery by name. As a fraudulent medium Chaffery is hoodwinking the credulous Lagune and obtaining considerable money for his deceptions. But a great surprise is in store for Lewisham, for in looking across the table just before the light is turned out for the joining of hands in the spirit circle, he meets eyes which are strangely familiar. It was Ethel! "The close green dress, the absence of a hat, and a certain loss of colour made her seem less familiar, but did not prevent the instant recognition. And there was recognition in her eyes."

"Immediately she looked away. At first his only emotion was surprise. He would have spoken, but a little thing robbed him of speech. For a moment he was unable to remember her surname. Moreover, the strangeness of his surroundings made him undecided. He did not know what was the proper way to address her—and he still kept to the superstition of etiquette. Besides—to speak to her would involve a general explanation to all these people. . . .

"'Just leave a pin-point of gas, Mr. Smithers, please,' said Lagune, and suddenly the one surviving jet of the gas chandelier was turned down and they were in darkness. The moment for recognition had passed."

Lewisham feels a sense of a presence hovering over him in the dark. Then something faintly luminous rises slowly in the air—a ghostly hand. Higher and higher this pallid luminosity rises

and Lewisham's attention follows it slavishly. For the moment he forgets even about his amazing meeting with Ethel. Immediately a tambourine begins to dance about and jangle without the help of any human agency, and a table somewhere beyond the medium commences to dance a jig.

Suddenly the gas-light flies up with a hiss, and reveals his friend Smithers, one hand on the gas tap, the other gripping the medium's wrist, and in the medium's hand—the incriminatory tambourine. Not far away from the medium the luminous hand is found—a pneumatic glove. Later Lewisham grasps the situation, and understands that Ethel has been aiding the medium in his deceptions. His suspicions are first aroused by the furtive way in which she attempted to pick up the shrivelled rubber hand immediately the light is turned up.

A little later Lewisham meets Ethel and learns that the medium is her step-father and that she is now acting as typewriter to Lagune. The girl is very upset over Lewisham's discovery that she has been more or less implicated in such trickery, and begs him not to speak to her again. Lewisham, however, insists on coming forward as her rescuer:

"'Listen to me,' said Lewisham. 'It is hard to say what I feel. I don't know myself . . . But I'm not going to lose you like this. I'm not going to let you slip a second time. I was

awake about it all last night. I don't care where you are, what your people are, nor very much whether you've kept quite clear of this medium humbug. I don't. You will in future. Anyhow, I've had a day and night to think it over. I had to come and try to find you. It's you. I've never forgotten you. Never! I'm not going to be sent back like this.' "

Lewisham has resolution, undoubted energy, and a vision that is more advanced than that of the ordinary student. There is every hope that he will climb to the top of the ladder at the School of Science until his second meeting with Ethel. But once the allurements of love gain the upper hand we know that his career is suspended, and we glean in every line that Wells is drumming a message in the ears of his readers. The message is not an altogether cheering one—it echoes the burden of Clough's poem, " Submit! Submit! " and drives one to remember Kipling's half-serious, half-mocking verses in " The Story of the Gadsbys " and the brutal frankness of its refrain : " He travels the fastest who travels alone."

Lewisham and Ethel are married by licence before the registrar :

" The little old gentleman was business-like but kindly. They made their vows to him, to a little black-bearded clerk and a lady who took off an apron in the nether part of the building to attend. The little old gentleman made no long speeches. ' You are young people,' he said

slowly, ' and life together is a difficult thing . . Be kind to each other.' He smiled a little sadly, and held out a friendly hand."

Ethel's eyes glistened and she found she could not speak.

The little old gentleman's warning that " life together is a difficult thing " was confirmed, and written in enduring letters of copper and brass in the first few months of their married life. Every little byway of married life had its tricky corner, and at the end of six months their first serious quarrel was registered. A certain Miss Heydinger, a student at the Normal School of Science who had been particularly friendly with Lewisham during his first years in London, continues to write to him, and her letters—purely letters dealing with the work at the college—cause Ethel to harbour strong feelings of suspicion regarding her husband's friendship in this direction. This forms one of the barbed arrows of discord, and after some very heated words with Ethel, Lewisham comes to the conclusion that he is in the wrong over the matter and decides to send her a huge bunch of roses as a kind of peace offering. Lewisham arrives home with a beating heart and expects to find Ethel excited and the roses displayed. But the roses have miscarried and he finds her white and jaded—looking more wretched than ever. However, he does not mention the flowers as he wishes them to be a great surprise for her, and faces a supper

full of chilly ceremonial and over-polite remarks. However, later on, Lewisham feels an extraordinary persuasion of the scent of roses near at hand, and has to look out in the hall, to convince himself that the box has not been placed there without any explanation, but there is no bouquet or scent of roses in the passage. On his return a creamy petal near the dressing-table attracts his attention and on lifting the valance he finds his roses crushed together on the floor.

"Why on earth did you put my roses here?" he asks.

"Your roses!" she cried. "What! Did *you* send those roses?"

More misunderstandings follow. Ethel admits that she has hidden the roses because she imagined they were sent to her by Baynes, a half-baked young poet, who occasionally sends his verses to her for typing. At this Lewisham is filled with blind unreasoning rage; he refuses to listen to Ethel's explanations, and resolves to break apart from her.

"He stood up resolutely. He kicked the scattered roses out of his way and dived beneath the bed for his portmanteau. Ethel neither spoke nor moved, but remained watching his movements. For a time the portmanteau refused to emerge, and he marred his stern resolution by a half audible, 'Come here—damn you!' He swung it into the living-room and returned for his box. He proposed to pack in that room.

"When he had taken all his personal possessions out of the bedroom, he closed the folding doors with an air of finality. He knew from the sounds that followed that she flung herself upon the bed, and that filled him with grim satisfaction."

Then came the waning of Lewisham's rage. He determined he would sleep that night in a chair, but as the reader, or any one else who has faced the torture of such a method of repose will readily bear witness, this is easier said than done. He dozed a little. Then he awoke and wondered why everything was so still.

He suddenly felt afraid, and sat for a long time trying to hear some movement where Ethel was sleeping. But everything was as still as death itself. Why was everything so still? He was invaded by the idea that something dreadful had happened. Creeping very slowly to where Ethel was lying half undressed on the bed, he stood watching her and fearing to move. He could hear nothing, not even the measured sound of her breathing. His face was very pinched and white as he stood there. Suppose—suppose the girl he had dragged into all this quagmire of married distress should have petered out, died without saying a word one way or the other to him. There was something about her face and attitude that was weird. He moved over to her quickly now, no longer heeding the sounds he made.

With great relief he found that she was not dead as he had foolishly imagined, and after a few moments she stirred and murmured. As Lewisham looked upon her white tear-stained face the girl seemed intolerably pitiful to him and everything but how he has wounded her that day is banished from his memory.

He forgot that they were going to part for ever. He felt nothing but a great joy that she could stir and speak. His jealousy flashed out of being. He dropped upon his knees.

"'Dear,' he whispered. 'Is it all right? I . . . . . I could not hear you breathing. I could not hear you breathing.'

"She started and was awake.

"'I was in the other room,' said Lewisham in a voice full of emotion. 'Everything was so quiet. I was afraid—I did not know what had happened. Dear—Ethel dear. Is it all right?'

"She sat up quickly and scrutinised his face. 'Oh! let me tell you,' she wailed. 'Do let me tell you. It's nothing. It's nothing. You wouldn't hear me. You wouldn't hear me. It wasn't fair—before you had heard me. . . .'

"His arms tightened about her. 'Dear,' he said, 'I knew it was nothing. I knew. I knew.'"

And so the novel ends on this note, and we take leave of Lewisham and Ethel happy once again, but facing a world bristling with troubles. Amongst Lewisham's additional responsibilities we must not forget that his mother-in-law

has unexpectedly become dependent upon him, for the fraudulent Chaffery has "skedaddled after having induced Lagune when hypnotised to sign a blank cheque as an 'autograph.'"

Lewisham, until the last chapter of the book is reached, shares with the Hooper-Kipps-Polly type of Wells creation a tendency to sudden passions and fits of temper, to outbursts of foolish rage against the obvious petty inconveniences of life. This is a common tendency on the part of many of the important male characters in Wells's books. But we get a gleam of light in our last glimpse of Lewisham, and that is his temptation to laugh in the face of all trouble. Here he is with a runaway swindler for a father-in-law, a penniless mother-in-law, a grimy graceless house at Clapham for home, and between the devil and the wide, wide sea in money matters. Does he rage and fret and fume? Not he. The thing takes him suddenly as being funny. He is tempted to laugh at it all. There are temptations that require all of one's strength to yield to, and Lewisham pulls himself together and yields to merriment.

Wells remarks:

"His laugh marked an epoch. Never before had Lewisham laughed at any fix in which he had found himself. The enormous seriousness of adolescence was coming to an end; the days of his growing were numbered. It was a laugh of infinite admissions."

CHAPTER XIV

"KIPPS"

"KIPPS" brings us directly into touch with one of the most distinctive features of Wells's method. He has not been able to resist a realistic touch in some of his early novels, which is only too obviously a rendering of his own biography in which he seeks to pay back old scores for days of drudgery in "the drapery" at Southsea. "Kipps" is an indictment drawn with perfect skill and crushing acrimony against persons and institutions that had irritated him in his early passage through life.

Kipps, the hero, who gives his name to the novel, has the good fortune to come into the comparative radiance of twelve hundred a year, while still serving as a draper's drudge in a Folkestone emporium. It must have been a great release to him, and more than enough to turn the head of such a "simple soul," especially when we come to consider the wolfish Mr. Shalford, his employer:

"He was an irascible, energetic little man with hairy hands, for the most part under his coat-tails, a long, shiny, bald head, a pointed aquiline nose a little askew, and a neatly-trimmed beard. He walked lightly and with a confident

jerk, and he was given to humming. He had added to exceptional business 'push' bankruptcy under the old dispensation, and judicious matrimony. His establishment was now one of the most considerable in Folkestone, and he insisted on every inch of frontage by alternate stripes of green and yellow down the houses over the shops. His shops were numbered 3, 5, and 7 on the street, and on his bill-heads 3 to 7. He encountered the abashed and awe-stricken Kipps with the praises of his system and himself. He spread himself out behind his desk with a grip on the lapel of his coat, and made Kipps a sort of speech. 'We expect y'r to work, y'r know, and we expect y'r to study our interests,' explained Mr. Shalford, in the regal and commercial plural. 'Our system here is the best system y'r could have. I made it, and I ought to know. I began at the very bottom of the ladder when I was fourteen, and there isn't a step in it I don't know. Not a step. Mr. Booch in the desk will give y'r the card of rules and fines. Jest wait a minute.' He pretended to be busy with some dusty memoranda under a paperweight, while Kipps stood in a sort of paralysis of awe regarding his new master's oval baldness. 'Two thous'n three forty-seven pounds,' whispered Mr. Shalford audibly, feigning forgetfulness of Kipps. Clearly a place of great transactions!"

There can be little doubt that the son of

Joseph Wells, the professional cricketer, found himself in a prison which was little better than the blacking manufactory in which Charles Dickens received his early training. But Wells, the man with a grievance, is much more effective than Dickens. In fact he is always effective; indeed he is effective even when he cannot claim to be quite free from faults himself. But to return to the education of Kipps. What is to be done with this h-less aspirant to higher things? Many are willing to help, but the central figure of all these good Samaritans is Mr. Chester Coote. He it is who offers to be the guide in this unknown world:

"Coote displayed all his teeth in a kindly, tremulous smile, and his eyes were shiny. 'Shake 'ands,' said Kipps, deeply moved; and he and Coote rose and clasped with mutual emotion.

"'It's reely too good of you,' said Kipps.

"'Whatever I can do I will,' said Coote.

"And so their compact was made. From that moment they were friends—intimate, confidential, high-thinking, *sotto-voce* friends. All the rest of their talk (and it inclined to be interminable) was an expansion of that. For that night Kipps wallowed in self-abandonment and Coote behaved as one who had received a great trust. That sinister passion for pedagogy to which the Good-Intentioned are so fatally liable, that passion of infinite presumption that permits

one weak human being to arrogate the direction of another weak human being's affairs, had Coote in its grip. He was to be a sort of lay confessor and director of Kipps; he was to help Kipps in a thousand ways; he was, in fact, to chaperon Kipps into the higher and better sort of English life. He was to tell him his faults, advise him about the right thing to do——

"'It's all these things I don't know,' said Kipps. 'I don't know, for instance, what's the right sort of dress to wear. I don't even know if I'm dressed right now——'

"'All these things'—Coote stuck out his lips and nodded rapidly to show he understood—'trust me for that,' he said, 'trust me.'"

Kipps did trust Mr. Coote, the middle-class Petronius before whom all the bloodless "literary people" of Folkestone bowed humbly. But somehow he felt very uneasy about himself. He felt that he would never be able to acquire the easy and contemptuous bearing of such a fellow as Chitterlow. The reader must be informed that Chitterlow is a chance met friend of Kipps', a "nacter chap," who when reproved by Mrs. Chitterlow for taking a potato with a jab of his fork, answered, "Well, you shouldn't have married a man of Genius."

Presently Woman, the saviour and consoler, steals into this nightmare life. Kipps first meets this creature of compact smugness and sweetness in the old days of the emporium and had accounted her as something wonderful and dis-

tant. She is Miss Helen Walsingham, and Coote approves of her. After all, she is not well off, and so she consents to swallow Kipps and his little fortune.

The engagement developed along the same lines of education as Coote's friendship. Young Walsingham showed Kipps how to shine in the art of "Swanking," "how to buy the more theatrical weeklies for consumption in the train, how to buy and what to buy in the way of cigarettes with gold tips and shilling cigars, and how to order hock for lunch and sparkling moselle for dinner, how to calculate the fare of a hansom cab—penny a minute while he goes—how to look intelligently at an hotel tape, and how to sit in a train like a thoughtful man instead of talking like a fool and giving yourself away." Mrs. Walsingham helped too as much as possible to lead young Kipps into the paths of sugar-and-water gentility. "She would tell him anecdotes of nice things done, of gentlemanly feats of graceful consideration; she would record her neat observations of people in trains and omnibuses; how, for example, a man had passed her change to the conductor, 'quite a common man he looked,' but he had lifted his hat." Coote's sister also joined in this persecution of civilisation. From her he learned to talk about pictures to Mrs. Walsingham: "That's rather nace. That lill' thing. There."

Kipps is on the high road to snobbery. And that is about all there is to it. He gathered

that with his marriage his name would become "Cuyps"—the homely name of Kipps being too vulgar for the Walsinghams.

"It'll be rum at first," said Kipps. But Kipps never realized how "rum" it would have really been if the net of the Walsinghams had not have just allowed him to slip through. But Kipps was destined to break away from it all. A housemaid whom he had loved sheepishly in his old unsophisticated days floats before his vision and he calls out for his own people, go-as-you-please table manners with winkles and thick bread and butter.

But first there came a little flutter of freedom, and Kipps passes on to his third world. "There were, no doubt, other worlds, but Kipps knew only these three: firstly, New Romney and the Emporium, constituting his primary world, his world of origin, which also contained Ann; secondly, the world of culture and refinement, the world of which Coote was chaperon, and into which Kipps was presently to marry, a world, it was fast becoming evident, absolutely incompatible with the first; and thirdly, a world still to a large extent unexplored, London."

Kipps endures the splendour of the Royal Grand Hotel for three days, but in the end the shackles of its pomp and ceremony defeat him. Besides, the waiters and porters there become quite facetious when he enters the dining room in evening dress and purple cloth slippers with golden marigolds. He meets a Socialist who

declaims fiercely about the existing state of things, and hints darkly at the lean years to come. It was all very interesting, and even exciting, but it was not that which made a Socialist of Arthur Kipps. It was a dinner at the Royal Grand Hotel that worked the final mischief, undermining all the sympathetic wisdom of Chester Coote :

" It was over the *vol au vent* that he began to go to pieces. He took a knife to it ; then saw the lady in pink was using a fork only, and hastily put down his knife, with a considerable amount of rich creaminess on the blade, upon the cloth. Then he found that a fork in his inexperienced hand was an instrument of chase rather than capture. His ears became violently red, and then he looked up to discover the lady in pink glancing at him, and then smiling, as she spoke to the man beside her.

" He hated the lady in pink very much.

" He stabbed a large piece of the *vol au vent* at last, and was too glad of his luck not to make a mouthful of it. But it was an extensive fragment, and pieces escaped him. Shirt front ! ' Desh it ! ' he said, and had resort to his spoon. His waiter went and spoke to two other waiters, no doubt jeering at him. He became very fierce suddenly. ' 'Ere ! ' he said, gesticulating ; and then, ' Clear this away ! '

" The entire dinner-party on his right, the party of the ladies in advanced evening-dress, looked at him . . . . He felt that every one was

catching him, and making fun at him, and the injustice of this angered him. After all, they had had every advantage he hadn't. And then, when they had got him there doing his best, what must they do but glance and sneer and nudge one another. He tried to catch them at it, and then took refuge in a second glass of wine.

"Suddenly and extraordinarily he found himself a Socialist. He did not care how close it was to the lean years when all these things would end."

After stabbing an ice pudding fiercely and sending it scudding with remarkable velocity across the floor, he shakes the dust of the place from his purple slippers, and leaves behind him every social ambition he has ever entertained. Then the simple Kipps tries to maintain his wilted dignity by tipping disdainful waiters and perky chambermaids at random. Finally he tips a South African diamond merchant, who is too absent-minded to resist. Then, convulsively, he makes his way to Charing Cross and Folkestone.

He marries the housemaid in the end, and is faced with many troubles and complications—the " stupid little tragedies of these clipped and limited lives." Kipps buys experience, and exchanges his inherited fortune for potential gold, arriving discursively at introspection, but he is never lofty or didactic. " I don't suppose," he says to his wife at the end of the book, " there ever was a chap quite like me before," and then, after a minute of reflection, he added this genuine comment upon life : " Oo !—I dunno ! "

CHAPTER XV

"Marriage"

"I'm going to get experience for humanity out of all my talents—and bury nothing," says one of Wells's characters; and that purpose seems to permeate every book he has written. He is an experimenter, putting mind in the making to a thousand tests, and dissecting the thought behind the thought in the most exhaustive manner. His novels are merely note books of practical tests, and he only publishes the details of his experiments. It is true he makes certain deductions, but he is always careful to warn us that they may not hold good for twelve months—or even twelve weeks. The reader need not be reminded how very frequently Wells changes his mind. And he does it without any shame or hesitation just as life changes in its process of force and growth. He will doubtless go on changing his mind till he changes this world for another. In this respect he is in agreement with Chamberlain's famous dictum—"Consistency is not so important; the main thing is that one should always be right."

And there we have the principle on which he follows up his deductions, and that is why we always find him tilting at our rule-of-thumb institutions, and attacking the world of Things

as they Are. He has always been the sworn foe of a "resting" world—for Wells, "rest" spells "rust."

In "Marriage" he seems to hint at some great helpful existence which flickers into the human mind at times—a force to which mere man responds very feebly, and has written in this connection:

"This permanent reality . . . . which is never really immediate, which draws continually upon human experience and influences human action more and more, but which is itself never the actual player upon the stage. It is the unseen dramatist who never takes a call."

The story, with all the feathers plucked from it, is that of the relations of Trafford to his wife and the things that happen to people, "nowadays, because they will not think things out, much less talk things out, and are therefore in a hopeless tangle of values that tightens sooner or later to a knot. . ."

It is not associated with any sexual tangles, but it leads on to a determination to "talk out" the meaning of life.

Wells surveys this world of ours and can find but few of its inhabitants who really "give themselves to those honourable adventures that extend the range of man." These are the scientists. For the rest, the intellectual and moral quality of too many of us is the quality of an "agitated rag-bag."

Marjorie is a member of the "rag-bag" community, but she goes to a university and afterwards meets Trafford, who is engaged in research relating to molecular physics. Otherwise she might have remained in the rag-bag with Mr. and Mrs. Pope, her father and mother, and the less fortunate of her brothers and sisters. Mr. Pope is a very clever study of one kind of man:

"When Mr. Pope had finished his letter to the *Times*, he got out of the window of the study, treading on a flower-bed as he did so—he was the sort of man who treads on flower-beds—partly with the purpose of reading his composition aloud to as many members of his family as he could assemble for the purpose, and so giving them a chance of appreciating the nuances of his irony more fully than if they saw it just in cold print without the advantage of his intonation, and partly with the belated idea of welcoming Marjorie."

Just as Marjorie is about to throw herself a ay on Will Magnet, the humorist, "a fairish man of forty, pale, with a large, protuberant, observant grey eye—I speak particularly of the left—and a face of quiet animation, warily alert for the wit's opportunity," the scientist Trafford falls from the sky in an aeroplane on to Mr. Pope's tennis lawn.

Trafford is a man of intellect and imagination. He has before him a brilliant future in scientific

research. He has no commonplace vices. He is devoted to his work with all the possibilities that it holds for him of some stupendous revolution in the laws which regulate inorganic and organic matter. Marjorie is immediately fascinated by the scientist. She feels a strange new wonder for this type of man as contrasted with Magnet, and becomes actively rebellious to her *fiancé*.

It must be understood it is simply because Marjorie is afflicted with an intolerable father, who cannot be allowed to carve the chicken because he "splashed too much and bones upset him and made him want to show up chicken in the *Times*"; and because she has got into debt at Oxbridge that she has at last consented to marry Magnet.

Marjorie does her best to appreciate and accept Magnet and his views, but she is a sprite of pure criticism—a complex little person, and really does not believe in her lover's devotion at all:

"She was anti-Magnet, a persistent insurgent. She was dreadfully unsettling. It was surely this Marjorie that wouldn't let the fact of his baldness alone, and who discovered and insisted upon a curious unbeautiful flatness in his voice whenever he was doing his best to speak from the heart. And as for this devotion, what did it amount to? A persistent, unimaginative besetting of Marjorie, a growing air of ownership,

an expansive, indulgent, smiling disposition to thwart and control. And he was always touching her! Whenever he came near her she would wince at the freedoms a large, kind hand might take with her elbow or wrist, at a possible sudden, clumsy pat at some erring strand of hair."

In the end Marjorie is found by her father kissing Professor Trafford in the shrubbery. Elopement with the scientist follows.

At the first blush Marjorie's elopement with a man with but little money appears a fine sacrifice on her part if we consider her warm, purring love of pleasure and luxury. But there are other aspects of the case. It is possible she was sharp enough to understand that Trafford had the power to acquire any amount of money should he choose to turn his keen mind to commercial enterprise. Indeed she may have held a resolution in the back of her mind that once married she would soon influence him to money-making excursions. But marriage is not the end of this book by a long way. The crisis is reached in the form of a civil war between them—war between the claims of the wife and the claims of the man of science. "In love one fails or one wins home," says Wells, "but the lure of research is for ever beyond the hills, every victory is a new desire; science has inexhaustibly fresh worlds to conquer. . ." So we find the married pair come to this point:

"It's been horrible waiting," said Marjorie,

without moving; "horrible! Where have you been?"

"I've been working. I got excited by my work. I've been at the laboratory. I've had the best spell of work I've ever had since our marriage."

"But I have been up all night!" she cried, with her face and voice softening to tears. "How *could* you? How *could* you?"

By her quiet persevering struggle for luxury and the higher social slopes of life she robs Trafford of all the calm repose that makes his brain smooth and active. Finally she drives him from his work altogether, and turns him into a scheming commercial prostitute, diverting his splendid, fearless research to hidden and secret work on a composition of rubber for a Jewish syndicate. She sucks him dry of money and furnishes her house without regard of their financial position. Then she goes on to lead him into preposterous social obligations, and uses his steadfast love as defensive armour behind which to level her implacable demands on his genius. She parades her children before him and boasts of the marvels of motherhood to avert discussion. And though she knows that their good position has been purchased with the surrender of all the joy in Trafford's life she does not relent. She continues to pursue her own selfish path, spends extravagantly, wastes her fine self on Movements (none of which, says Wells, are of any use).

All the while the husband and wife drift further apart. The indication of impending disaster comes in Trafford's realisation that they do not *talk.* "We don't talk. It's astonishing—how we don't. We don't. We can't. We try to, and we can't."

Trafford becomes almost frantic over the shallow pleasures and "artistic" surroundings of low-grade and law-abiding prosperity as he sees these things presented in the motley collection of ambitious persons who now gather at his house.

In the end he rebels, and takes his wife away from this "busy death" in London and sets her down for a space amid the white silences of Labrador. Amid the thrilling dangers of a wild solitude and a grim winter, they discover themselves. They come near to one another in moments of peril, deprivation, and self-sacrifice. He passionately asserts, she passionately agrees, that "we can't *do* things. We don't bring things off!" "The real thing is to get knowledge, and express it." "This Being—opening its eyes, listening, trying to comprehend. Every good thing in man is that—looking and making pictures, listening and making songs, making philosophies and sciences, trying new powers, bridge and engine, spark and gun. At the bottom of my soul, *that.*" He sees man without "eyes for those greater things, but we've got the promise —the intimation of yes."

After this, we are to suppose, all is well with

them. But what will they become when they return? Will Marjorie be able to resist the lure of the Bond Street shops? How will she act when Aunt Plessington's guests once more besiege her, and social life presents itself again in its garish variety? Is this visit to the wild more decisive than marriage itself? Will their brief vision of God, their intellectual and spiritual conversion, make them "live happily ever after"?

I think that Wells has his doubts about it, although he has tried to make things look cheerful. He even goes so far as to assure us that Trafford has already renounced his laboratory, and is thinking of becoming a kind of H. G. Wells himself:

"'My dear,' he said, at last, 'I've thought of that. But since I left that dear, dusty little laboratory, and all those exquisite subtle things—I've lived. I've left that man seven long years behind me. Some other man must go on—I think some younger man—with the riddles I found to work on them. I've grown—into something different. It isn't how atoms swing with one another, or why they build themselves up so and not so, that matters any more to me. I've got you and all the world in which we live, and a new set of riddles filling my mind, how thought swings about thought, how one man attracts his fellows, how the waves of motion and conviction sweep through a crowd, and all the

little drifting crystallizations of spirit with spirit and all the repulsions and eddies and difficulties that one can catch in that turbulent confusion. I want to do a new sort of work now altogether . . . . Life has swamped me once, but I don't think it will get me under again; I want to study man.' "

The critics thought that the manner of Trafford's escape from the things which defrauded his soul was ill considered and unworkable. But the more one thinks over the matter the plainer it appears that, although the idea seems mild and fanciful, it would be difficult to suggest any better scheme. I puzzle to conceive how anything else but a complete withdrawal from every lure or obligation of social life could have saved Marjorie—if indeed Wells really intends us to think of Marjorie as a changed woman. Only the loneliness of a Labrador winter could have given them that clearer vision of all the movements and hindrances of human endeavour. From such a detached standpoint it was certainly more probable that Marjorie would have a chance of vaguely feeling that "Something trying to exist" . . . . that "Something" which isn't substance, doesn't belong to space or time, something stifled and enclosed, struggling to get through.

The mood recorded above is repeated later, and of course is familiar to most thinking people. It is the Veiled Being, which seems to be always

fighting for the ascendency over Ahriman the angel of evil, but who is not all powerful. However, we are given to understand that the Veiled Being does recognizably influence the course of events. " ' It struggles to exist, becomes conscious, becomes now conscious of itself. That is where I came in as a part of it. Above the beast in me is that—the desire to know better, to know—beautifully, and to transmit my knowledge. That's all there is in life for me beyond food and shelter and tidying up. This Being—opening its eyes, listening, trying to comprehend. Every good thing in man is that—looking and making pictures, listening and making songs . . . We began with bone-scratching. We're still—near it. I'm just a part of this beginning—mixed with other things. Every book, every art, every religion is that, the attempt to understand and express—mixed with other things.' "

The foundation of " Marriage " is a very delightful novel, and thousands of people have read it without even being aware of the absorbing philosophy of the superstructure which lies within its middle two hundred pages. Wells the thinker is deliberately overlooked by the heedless novel reader, and his new criticism of life is regarded as " great cry but little wool, as the De'il said when he plucked the pig."

The " long talks," we are told, at Lonely Hut among the everlasting snows, marked an

epoch to Marjorie. There were times when Trafford's talk affected her like "that joy of light one has in emerging into sunshine from a long and tedious cave. He smashed and scattered absurd yet venerated conventions of thought, made undreamt-of courses of action visible in a flare of luminous necessity. From that day forth her imagination began to shape a new, ordered and purposeful life for Trafford and herself in London, a life not altogether divorced from their former life, but with a faith sustaining it and aims controlling it. She had always known of the breadth and power of his mind, but now as he talked of what he might do, what interests might converge and give results through him, it seemed she really knew him for the first time."

Personally, I think that Wells is too trustful about the sudden upheaval in Marjorie's method of life. But I don't know . . . . . a world without women like Marjorie to bang about in would be a dull place. At any rate I wish this wilful little woman happiness in the end. But in this odd, exasperating, this infinitely diverting world of ours I am almost certain she would never get it. After reading the following passage, which comes almost at the end of the book, we feel the "note" of a renewed conflict in her passion for the trivial immediate beauty of a well-ordered house:

"As she went about the preparation of the

tea, her vividly concrete imagination was active with the realization of the life they would lead on their return. She could not see it otherwise than framed in a tall, fine room, a study, a study in sombre tones, with high, narrow, tall, dignified bookshelves and rich deep green curtains veiling its windows. There should be a fireplace of white marble, very plain and well proportioned, with furnishings of old brass, and a big desk towards the window beautifully lit by electric light, with abundant space for papers to lie. And she wanted some touch of the wilderness about it; a skin perhaps . . . .

"The tea was still infusing when she had determined upon an enormous paper-weight of that iridescent Labradorite that had been so astonishing a feature of the Green River Valley. She would have it polished on one side only—the other should be rough to show the felspar in its natural state. . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

"The Invisible Man"

The fanciful notion of an invisible man has been the theme of many essays and stories; indeed, the idea is too full of possibilities to have escaped either philosopher or writer of scientific romance. It can be traced back to the Greek mythus, or found in the Bab Ballads. Various aspects of the miraculous gift of invisibility have been presented by Guy de Maupassant and by an obscure writer, Fitzjames O'Brien. The common or garden invisible man is generally supposed to clothe himself with invisibility as with a ready-made suit which he can jump in or out of with the greatest freedom, able to indulge in all his cravings for good or evil without fouling the restrictions which restrain and hamper ordinary men. But Wells in his romance "The Invisible Man" carries the idea well away from the earlier romantics, and deals with the subject very convincingly. He seeks to reduce the impossible into terms of the probable, and to answer the question: "How would a man progress once he became invisible?" Other writers on invisibility have rather shirked the question of the necessity for food and clothes and the various ways in which the material man,

however elusive his shell may be, must leave some perceptible traces of his movements. The hero of the story, Griffin, does not sell his soul to the Devil, employ the ring of Gyges, or improve upon Shakespeare's "receipt of fern-seed." He is simply a medical student, of University College, who forsakes medicine and takes up physics. Light and optical density fascinate him and he makes up his mind to devote his life to this subject which is such a network of riddles. The theory of Griffin, and his method of winning the gift of invisibility, as explained to Dr. Kemp, are clear enough to make us wonder whether the thing after all is such a very impossible achievement:

"Just think of all the things that are transparent and seem not to be so! Paper, for instance, is made up of transparent fibres, and it is white and opaque only for the same reason that a powder of glass is white and opaque. Oil white paper, fill up the interstices between the particles with oil, so that there is no longer refraction or reflection except at the surfaces, and it becomes as transparent as glass. And not only paper, but cotton fibre, linen fibre, wool fibre, woody fibre, and *bone*, Kemp; *flesh*, Kemp; *hair*, Kemp; *nails* and *nerves*, Kemp; in fact, the whole fabric of a man, except the red of his blood and the dark pigment of hair, are all made up of transparent, colourless tissue—so little suffices to make us visible one to the

other. For the most part, the fibres of a living creature are no more opaque than water."

Griffin has an intensely evil soul; and, what is more, he has the power of skilfully concealing his wickedness behind a mask of scientific enthusiasm. One feels that all his misdeeds are pardonable seeing that his brain is so abnormally acute. In order to obtain money to carry on his experiments he robs his own father of money which he is holding in trust, and the old man, fearing to face the matter out, shoots himself. Griffin does not lift his finger to save his father's character.

In an old house in Great Portland Street he begins by first rendering cotton wool invisible. A string of statements about optical density—"a network of riddles"—about the tissue of the human frame, and the result of "lowering its refractive index," with a reference to the Rontgen Rays and other still more mysterious vibrations, throws a scientific glamour over the experiments. Griffin watches the wool fabric fade away like a wreath of smoke and vanish. He can hardly believe he has made it invisible, but he stretches out his hand in the emptiness and there is the thing quite solid, but in no way perceivable by the eye. At this juncture a cat finds her way into the room, and the invisible wool gives pussy a severe nerve shock. In three or four hours Griffin has processed the cat:

"The bones and sinews and the fat were the last to go, and the tips of the coloured hairs. And, as I say, the back part of the eye, tough, iridescent stuff it is, wouldn't go at all.

"It was night outside long before the business was over, and nothing was to be seen but the dim eyes and the claws. I stopped the gas-engine, felt for and stroked the beast, which was still insensible, released its fastenings, and then, being tired, left it sleeping on the invisible pillow and went to bed."

With the Invisible Cat Griffin feels that the prize is within his grasp. He has barely twenty pounds left in the world, and his landlord with several of the neighbours are daily growing suspicious and aggressive towards him. He makes up his mind to vanish, setting to work upon his preparations forthwith. The thing was done that evening and night and he fades away himself out of human sight. The strange horror of seeing his own hands grow like clouded glass until he could see the sickly disorder of the gloomy room through them is a passage in which Wells shows the true vision of the seeker, and must be read in its entirety to be fully appreciated:

"I closed my transparent eyelids. My limbs became glassy, the bones and arteries faded, vanished, and the little white nerves went last. I gritted my teeth and stayed there to the end. . . . At last only the dead tips of the finger-

nails remained, pallid and white, and the brown stain of some acid upon my fingers."

Griffin soon discovers that the change he has undergone is subject to fatal limitations. It is true that he has himself disappeared, but his clothes remain, and no scientific process can conceal the snow which falls on his shoulders, the mud which clings to his feet, or the money in his hand which he takes out of other people's cash boxes. He cannot even protect his eyes from the glare of sun or the sudden flare of gaslight, for his eyelids are transparent. Also the least involuntary noise betrays him.

"'An invisible man,' he said, 'is a man of power.' He stopped for a moment to sneeze violently."

Griffin is walking about the high roads without a stitch of clothing on his back and he speedily finds out that even an invisible man cannot face cold, exposure, snowstorms and night without some kind of shelter. However, in Drury Lane he makes his way into a shop, secretes himself, and in the end knocks the owner on the head and steals clothes, wig, mask and spectacles. He gags the wardrobe dealer with a Louis Quatorze vest, and ties him up in a sheet—head away from the string.

There is one weak detail in the story at this point—Griffin dismisses without due consideration the plan of making himself visible again by painting his face in its natural colours instead

of veiling the poverty of his appearance by means of bandages and a false nose.

The Invisible Man after having equipped himself takes stock of his appearance in the looking glass :

" ' Then came a curious hesitation. Was my appearance really creditable ? I tried myself with a little bedroom looking-glass, inspecting myself from every point of view to discover any forgotten chink, but it all seemed sound. I was grotesque to the theatrical pitch—a stage miser—but I was certainly not a physical impossibility. Gathering confidence, I took my looking-glass down into the shop, pulled down the shop blinds, and surveyed myself from every point of view with the help of the cheval glass in the corner.

" ' I spent some minutes screwing up my courage, and then unlocked the shop door and marched out into the street, leaving the little man to get out of his sheet again when he liked. In five minutes a dozen turnings intervened between me and the costumier's shop. No one appeared to notice me very pointedly. My last difficulty seemed overcome.' "

But disillusionment again. Faint with the desire for a good savoury meal Griffin decides to treat himself to a sumptuous feast (with part of the money he has stolen from the Drury Lane costumier's shop) and is already ordering lunch, when it occurs to him that he cannot eat unless

he exposes his invisible face. He retreats from the restaurant exasperated, and reflects on the helpless absurdity of an Invisible Man in the heart of a civilised city in a cold and dirty climate :

" ' Before I made this mad experiment I had dreamt of a thousand advantages. That afternoon it seemed all disappointment. I went over the heads of the things a man reckons desirable. No doubt invisibility made it possible to get them, but it made it impossible to enjoy them when they are got. Ambition—what is the good of pride of place when you cannot appear there ? What is the good of the love of woman when her name must needs be Delilah ? I have no taste for politics, for the blackguardisms of fame, for philanthropy, for sport. What was I to do ? And for this I had become a wrapped-up mystery, a swathed and bandaged caricature of a man.' "

A doubt might suggest itself to the curious whether by further manipulation of the refractive index Griffin ought not to have been able at once to bring himself back to visibility without having to retire to a remote village in Sussex with bottles and dynamos to find out how to do so. However, Wells transports him to the " Coach and Horses " at Iping and we must also follow him there. Once at the Sussex village Griffin soon becomes the main subject of conversation with all the village people. The

first suspicions are aroused when old Fearenside's dog springs straight for Griffin's leg, his teeth finding flesh and bone where others could only see space :

" ' I'll tell you something,' said Fearenside mysteriously. It was late in the afternoon, and they were in the little beershop of Iping Hanger.

" ' Well ? ' said Teddy Hanfrey.

" ' This chap you're speaking of, what my darg bit. Well—he's black. Leastways his legs are.

" ' I seed through the tear of his trousers and the tear of his glove. You'd have expected a sort of pinky to show, wouldn't you ? Well—there wasn't none. Just blackness. I tell you he's as black as my hat.'

" ' My sakes ! ' said Hanfrey. ' It's a rummy case altogether. Why, his nose is as pink as paint ! '

" ' That's true,' said Fearenside. ' I knows that. And I tell 'ee what I'm thinking. That marn's a piebald, Teddy ; black here and white there—in patches. And he's ashamed of it. He's a kind of half-bred, and the colour's come off patchy instead of mixing. I've heard of such things before. And it's the common way with harrses, as any one can see.' "

A song called " The Bogey Man " was popular at this time, and the villagers took pleasure in singing a bar or so of this ditty whenever the

stranger appeared, and little children yelled "Bogey Man!" after him, and scampered away tremendously elated.

Griffin suddenly finds himself short of money again and in the small hours of the morning breaks into the vicarage and helps himself to the housekeeper's reserve—a few pounds in gold. He is at once suspected of the burglary. The prosaic acceptance of the situation by Jaffers, the constable, who has to arrest a moving suit of clothes, "'Ed or no 'ed," is a gem of Wells's sprightly humour:

"'No doubt,' he says, 'you are a bit difficult to see in this light, but I got a warrant and it's all correct. What I'm after ain't no invisibility, it's burglary. There's a house been broken into and money took.'"

Wells has a peculiar talent for thrusting the miraculous upon circumstances the most ordinary and familiar, divesting it of every shred of romance and pursuing it over hill and dale with merciless logic. In reading "Jules Verne" we feel that he is quite prepared for the reader to exclaim, "What a fantastic rigmarole to be sure." But Wells is deadly earnest, and is all the time struggling to stamp out the idea of artificiality out of the mind of the reader. The whole atmosphere is so natural and all the villagers would undoubtedly have said and done just what he makes them say and do—the parson, the doctor, and the landlady; or the tramp who comes

across the invisible wanderer on a bare Sussex down, and can only give up the enigma when he has stones thrown at him.

" ' It's a fair do,' said Mr. Thomas Marvel, sitting up, taking his wounded toe in hand, and fixing his eye on the third missile, ' I don't understand. Stones flinging themselves. Stones talking. Put yourself down. Rot away. I'm done.' "

Another lively study in the grotesque is the scene where Griffin gets violent with his landlady and starts to bombard her with the lighter articles of furniture :

" The stranger's hat hopped off the bed-post, described a whirling flight in the air through the better part of a circle, and then dashed straight at Mrs. Hall's face. Then, as swiftly came the sponge from the washstand, and then the chair, flinging the stranger's coat and trousers carelessly aside and laughing drily in a voice singularly like the stranger's, turned itself up with its four legs at Mrs. Hall, seemed to take aim at her for a moment and charged at her."

Towards the end of the story Griffin becomes a mad hunted creature. All the countryside are on his track. He dreams of a reign of terror, and expounds his ideas to one of his former college friends :

" ' Not wanton killing, but a judicious slaying. the point is : They know there is an Invisible Man—as well as we know there is an Invisible

Man—and that Invisible Man, Kemp, must now establish a Reign of Terror. He must take some town, like your Burdock, and terrify and dominate it. He must issue his orders. He can do that in a thousand ways—scraps of paper thrust under doors would suffice. And all who disobey he must kill, and kill all who would defend them.' "

The very fact that Griffin is such an undiluted scoundrel saves the reader from being too much harrowed by his very unpleasant adventures and violent death. A hue and cry is raised at the heels of the Invisible Man. Hardly a dozen yards behind him a huge navvy, cursing in fragments and slashing viciously with a spade . . . then the spade whirling through the air, and a dull thud.

" An old woman, peering under the arm of the big navvy, screamed sharply. ' Looky there ! ' she said, and thrust out a wrinkled finger. And looking where she pointed, everyone saw, faint and transparent, as though made of glass, so that veins and arteries, and bones and nerves could be distinguished, the outline of a hand—a hand limp and prone. It grew clouded and opaque even as they stared."

As a pure romance devoid of any of the old tricks of the trade, " The Invisible Man " will still bear comparison to any of Wells's later work in this direction. The Wells of 1922 need not look back with any regret on the Wells of 1898.

The technique here is complete and his thought is always on the wing. The interest in the progress of the story is carried forward with a splendid movement to the climax, when the hunted Griffin turns to bay filled with all the violence of an infuriated tiger. Then his unseen death agony and the return to visibility, his bruised and broken body, naked and pitiful in God's honest sunlight, and on his face an expression of "anger and dismay," which one student of Wells* has suggested might be taken as a symbol of "man's revolt against imprisonment in the flesh."

* "H. G. Wells," by J. D. Beresford (Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1915)

CHAPTER XVII

The Essex of H. G. Wells

Without being in any sense a "show" county, Essex is never disappointing. Alike to the wayfarer who journeys through its lanes and unfrequented villages for the first time, and to him who is rooted in its steadfast clay, and draws from it nourishment and "memories out of mind," there is a deep fascination in its friendly plains. The chalk hills in the north where Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire adjoin it are very charming; the coast line is cut up by tidal rivers in a most miraculous manner and there are to be found at Mersea Island some of the loneliest places within an hour of London that any man can imagine. Although there are no inland lagoons and noble downs, the rivers are so charming that they go a long way to making up for this want. On the north the river Stour divides the county from the rich Suffolk pasturage and feeds those wonderful meadows and watermills which Constable loved so well and painted for the world with never-failing sympathy. Constable's pictures are imperishable. There is the soul of Essex in them, and the presence of that fourth dimension which does not exist for the stranger. Essex will never forget

Constable — he is a friendly ghost—"just mellowish and warmish like"—and he has outfaced death by the radiant life he has put on his canvases. The sense of atmosphere with which he has informed such a landscape as "The Cornfield" (now on the walls at the National Gallery) recalls the fine lines of Hilaire Belloc:

> He does not die that can bequeath
> Some influence to the land he knows,
> Or dares, persistent, interwreath
> Love permanent with the wild hedgerows;
> He does not die, but still remains
> Substantiate with his darling plains.

The choice if not very abundant woodland scenery of Hainault Forest, views wide stretches of country, the quaintest old houses, pretty commons and village greens, fields of the showy "Essex Great Wheat" which towers two feet higher than the "foreigner's" crops, and yields a straw which has been precious for thatching from a time long before the beginning of history —these are only a few of the other attractions Essex has to offer.

You may study the rivers Stort and Lea on the west, which divide the county from Hertfordshire, and realise that strange kinship between personality and place which Izaak Walton has expressed in his "Compleat Angler." If "the world is too much with us" I can imagine no more restful holiday than one spent in following in the tracks of "the best of fishermen and men" in this corner of Essex. "Among all your readings," wrote Charles Lamb to

Coleridge, "did you ever light upon Walton's 'Compleat Angler?' It breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart. There are many choice old verses interspersed in it; it would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it; it would Christianise every discordant, angry passion; pray make yourself acquainted with it."

Our dear old Izaak, as Wordsworth noted on the flyleaf of his "Compleat Angler," was "nobly versed in simple discipline," and he could thank God for the smell of lavender, and the songs of birds, and a "good day's fishing"; for "health and a competence and a quiet conscience." "Every misery that I miss is a new mercy," he says to his honest scholar, as they walk towards Tottenham High Cross, "and therefore let us be thankful. What would a blind man give to see the pleasant rivers and meadows and flowers that we have met with since we met together; and this, and many other like blessings we enjoy daily."

In the rabbit-warren bazaars at the back of the market place in Damascus, I came once by accident upon a certain man. He was just about to "shake off this mortal coil," and a native cigarette maker called me in to witness his dissolution just to see that there was no foul play "and to save lot of trouble 'bout his finish" afterwards. For the past twenty years this Englishman had lived in the cigarette

maker's noisome hovel annihilating time and hunger and hope with opium and certain bottles of peculiarly acrid Syrian brandy, and the manner of his death was not a thing I ever care to recall. However, the one thing I do often think about is the way he insisted upon explaining to me that he was born at Dunmow. He wished the fact stated on his gravestone, and bequeathed me all that he had left (being divers debts owing to natives for brandy and opium) to see that his wish was carried out. "Dunmow: what a very clumsy name for a gravestone," I said to myself. It is, indeed, an ungraceful name is it not?

Although an East Anglian by birth, I must admit that I had never penetrated to Dunmow till after I had read "Mr. Britling Sees it Through," and for many years I wondered why that expiring outcast felt such an inexplicable heart-hunger for the place, and wasted his last breath in stamping the name on my memory.

But a short holiday in Essex tracing the landmarks of the H. G. Wells country has set at rest my curiosity for ever and ever. The dying opium drinker was well justified in wishing the name DUNMOW to be prominent on his gravestone. By the Lord! I cannot imagine what kink in his brain ever made him desert his native town in the first instance. Maybe it was a girl who did not love him, or loved him too well, or he felt the fires of Drake and

Columbus scorching his soul. Perhaps the undefinable and insistent call of the East loomed upon him and dwarfed every other longing desire, and by a happy blending of good and evil things he hoped to win fame and fortune, come back to Dunmow, walk the fields of Easton and—

> From the sun
> Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;
> Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
> And with the trees to newer birth;
> And find, when fighting shall be done,
> Great rest, and fulness after dearth.

O delectable lands of our dreams! O Valley of Bliss, or whatever Garden of Delight our erring feet have missed! How twisted and deceitful are the pathways to your gates! George Gissing asks in one of his early novels: "Is not the best of life that involuntary flush of memory upon instants of the eager past?" I think that most of us will be ready to agree with him. Dunmow was not the place my opium-eater deliberately sought to remember at last, or raved about during his carousals with Arab horse-dealers, or eulogized in his letters to a brother who lived in Brixton. Some cunning power beyond any sense of individual taste or preference awakened a complete satisfaction in his soul that he had been born there, and that his ghost might at least return to soften the drowsy Essex twilight in summer or "ride the loud October sky" in winter.

Dunmow is a "friendly town"—there is no

misnomer there—but I have a deep-rooted belief that my friend the opium-eater was not only thinking of the topographical features of the town. It is possible that, because of his lineage and memories of the Essex soil, the titivating aroma of the famous Dunmow ale waxed strong in his nostrils at the last moment, and it was vouchsafed to him to see how foolish he had been to desert Essex and ale for the East and opium. Of course that is only conjecture. . . . .

About two miles through Dunmow is H. G. Wells's house, called Easton Glebe. It is in the park of the Countess of Warwick, and is surrounded by most charming woods, and the adjoining lands have as much seclusion and wildness as any lover of nature could desire. This untrodden nook of England has a quiet charm about it which those only who have lived in it can really justly value, and to the botanist the flora of Essex is one of particular appeal. The early botanists and herbalists were very much attracted to the countryside about Dunmow. John Vaughan, in a fascinating article on "Essex and the Early Botanists," tells how Gerarde, who occupied the position of "herbarist" to James I, made frequent expeditions—at that time termed "simpling-voyages"—to many odd nooks and corners of the country:

"From the entries scattered up and down

the sixteen hundred folio pages of his 'Herbal' it would appear that he was acquainted with the district north of the Thames, from Ilford to Leigh; he was also familiar with Mersea Isle, and the salt-marshes about Walton and Dovercourt; while inland we find him at Chelmsford and Colchester, in the neighbourhood of Dunmow and Braintree, and further north at Pebmarsh and Castle Hedingham. It is most interesting to note the plants which attracted the attention of the old herbalist as he went on his 'simpling-voyages' about the county. Over seventy species he mentions as occurring in Essex; some, as the wild clematis, the saw-wort, and the butcher's broom, as found 'in divers places'; others, with exact reference to the spots where they may be found. The curious mousetail, so-called because of the arrangement of its carpels 'resembling very notably the taile of a mouse,' he found 'in Woodford Row, in Waltham Forrest, and in the orchard belonging to Mr. Francis Whetstone in Essex.' The burnet or Scotch rose he notes as growing 'very plentifully in a field as you go from a village in Essex called Graies (upon the brinke of the river Thames) up to Horndon on the hill, insomuch that the field is full fraught therewith all over.' 'Upon the church walls of Railey' the little wall-rue fern (*Asplenium Ruta-muraria, L.*) was abundant in Gerarde's days; and in 'a wood hard by a gentleman's house called Mr. Leonard, dwelling

upon Dawes heath,' the golden rod was in flower, and the tutsan or parke-leaves, ' out of which is pressed a juice, not like black bloud, but Claret or Gascoigne wine.' ' Neere to Lee in Essex,' over against Canvey Island, our herbarist found the lily of the valley, and in the woods thereabouts the yellow dead-nettle; while ' in the greene places by the sea side at Lee among the rushes and in sundry other places thereabouts ' the beautiful meadow saxifrage grew then, as now, abundantly. On the sea-shore and in the salt-marshes which here stretch away for many a mile he noticed a number of maritime plants such as the marsh mallow, the sea lavender, and the rare *Euphorbia Paralias, L.*, or sea spurge."

At Dunmow other interesting plants indicated by Gerarde include: " The common tway-blade, the ' wilde white hellebor or helleborine, and the liquorice wetch,' the leaves whereof hath the taste of liquorice root."

But a name more illustrious than that of Gerarde is associated with Essex:

" We refer to the illustrious John Ray, the foremost naturalist of his age, and the founder of modern scientific botany. He was born at Black Notley, near Braintree, some twelve years after the death of Gerarde. The entry of his baptism may still be made out in the church register, stained and brown with age, and runs in almost illegible writing: ' John son of Roger and Eliz Wray bapt. June 29, 1628.' In later

life John Ray (as he came afterwards to spell his name) returned to his native village and built a house 'on Dewlands,' where he died in the year 1705. Ray's stately tomb, a pyramidal monument some ten feet in height and bearing a lengthy Latin inscription, may still be visited in the churchyard."

But we must return to the Wells landmarks. The reader will have no difficulty in connecting the Countess of Warwick's barn theatre at Little Easton with the "Tithe Barn at Claverings" where the Flemish refugees were distributed, under the personal supervision of Lady Homartyn in "Mr. Britling Sees it Through." This barn, a very lofty and ancient building, has been placed at the disposal of the Dunmow Progressive Club by the Countess in order to give the intellectual life of the villages around "just the tiniest push forward." Plays in the Essex dialect have been given there, besides J. M. Synge's "Tinker's Wedding," Sir James Barrie's "Twelve Pound Look," and Mr. S. L. Bensusan's comedy "The Furiner."

Wells has not had the heart to outrage the Essex tradition by having any elaborate electric system in his Essex home. Acetylene gas is used for lighting the house. He has himself shown how perfectly hateful an electric lighting outfit is to the rustic, and has explained that it is too "slippery and glib" for the twilight quietness of the peasant mind :

"At Claverings here they still refuse to have electric bells. There was a row when the Solomonsons, who were tenants here for a time, tried to put them in. . . . ."

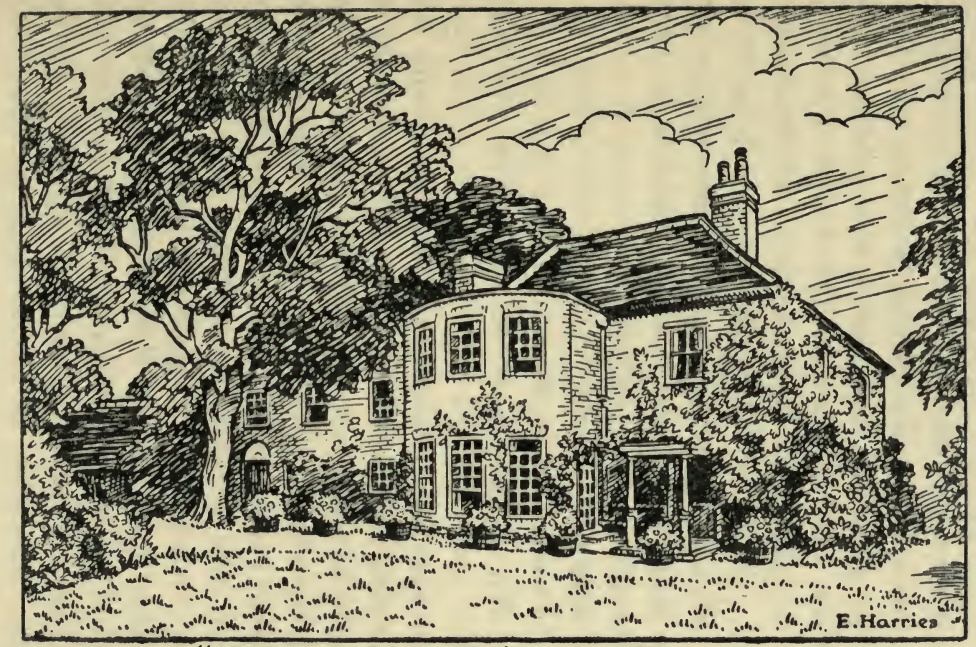
I could find it in my heart to envy the Essex rustic who surveys electricity with such intense disfavour. He possesses the blessings the Greek poet knew were the finest things in the world—deep peace and quiet breathing. If Hodge keeps away from the soul-destroying lure of electricity he will in all probability steer clear of crime, desire for riches, telephones, bawling bankers and stockbrokers, fried-fish shops, motor-cycles, aeroplanes and film-actresses. After all, there is much comfort in that thought.

Wells has faithfully described his house in "Mr. Britling" and has not exaggerated its agreeable appearance:

"It was a square-looking old red-brick house he had come to, very handsome in a simple Georgian fashion, with a broad lawn before it and great blue cedar trees, and a drive that came frankly up to the front door and then went off with Mr. Britling and the car round to unknown regions at the back. The centre of the house was a big airy hall, oak-pannelled, warmed in winter only by one large fireplace and abounding in doors which he knew opened into the square separate rooms that England favours."

No wonder that our author likes to get away from all the rush of London to this dear secluded corner of England, with its yellow-plastered and red-roofed dwellings, curious timber churches, and kind souls!—for that is another of the charms of Essex: the old-world politeness and chivalry of the natives. This survival of rustic simplicity and mellowness in some of the country folk must not be mistaken for stupidity; indeed these qualities often cover a deep philosophy and a stubborn spirit which under a show of submission, humility, generous hat touching and murmurs of "Just as you do please, sir," wins its way through against all adverse opinion and argument. The Essexer may be called silly, but it is better to be sure than clever, and sharpness too often outflanks politeness. As long as Essex can embranch and broaden the mind of such a writer as H. G. Wells, to quote only one up-to-date example, the county can afford to ignore those who call it dull and stupid. Wells writes of the fascination of Essex with sureness and sympathy in "Mr. Britling":

"The suburbs of London stretch west and south and even west by north, but to the north-eastward there are no suburbs; instead there is Essex. Essex is not a suburban county, it is a characteristic and individualised county which wins the heart. Between dear Essex and the centre of things lie two great barriers, the East End of London and Epping Forest. Before a train



"Easton Glebe," Little Easton.

could get to any villadom with a cargo of season-ticket holders it would have to circle about this rescued woodland and travel for twenty unprofitable miles, and so once you are away from the main Great Eastern lines Essex still lives in the peace of the eighteenth century, and London, the modern Babylon, is, like the stars, just a light in the nocturnal sky. In Matching's Easy, as Mr. Britling presently explained to Mr. Direck, there are half-a-dozen old people who have never set eyes on London in their lives—and do not want to.

" ' Aye-ya ! '

" ' Fussin' about thea.'

" ' Mr. Robinson, 'e went to Lon', 'e did. That's 'ow 'e 'urt 'is fut.' "

No one has drawn a better picture of the obstinate Essex rustic. The station-master of Matching's Easy is a splendid study of the liveliness and tenacity of a certain type of East Anglian peasant. As a matter of fact this official " with the determined looking face and sea voice " is an actual living character, and is locally called " the talking fish." Matching's Easy station, where the trains only stop " by request," is perchance Easton Lodge station, and the scene of the discourse on sweet peas so effectively delivered by the voluble station-master :

" Mr. Darling what's head gardener up at Claverings, *'e* can't get sweet peas like that, try *'ow* 'e will. Tried everything 'e 'as. Sand

ballast, 'e's tried. Seeds same as me. 'E came along 'ere only the other day, 'e did, and 'e says to me, 'e says, 'darned 'f I can see why a station-master should beat a professional gardener at 'is own game,' 'e says, 'but you do. And in your orf time, too, so's to speak,' 'e says. 'I've tried sile,' 'e says—"

"Your first visit to England?" asked Mr. Britling of his guest.

"Absolutely," said Mr. Direck.

"I says to 'im, 'there's one thing you 'aven't tried,' I says," the station-master continued, raising his voice by a Herculean feat still higher.

"I've got a little car outside here," said Mr. Britling. "I'm a couple of miles from the station."

"I says to 'im, I says, ''ave you tried the vibritation of the trains?' I says. 'That's what you 'aven't tried, Mr. Darling. That's what you *can't* try,' I says. 'But you rest assured that that's the secret of my sweet peas,' I says, 'nothing less and nothing more than the vibritation of the trains.'"

The head gardener at Claverings mentioned above is another local celebrity—Mr. Lister of Easton Lodge, horticulturist to the Countess of Warwick.

The old thatched inn, "The Stag," which stands in the roadway opposite the Easton demesne, will not fail to arrest attention. But the pilgrim, should he ask a rustic to direct

him to this house of refreshment, must not call it "The Stag"—it is locally known as the "Plumper's Arms." The house is faithfully described by Wells in "Mr. Britling" as "an inn with a sign standing out in the road, a painted sign of the Clavering Arms, it had a water trough (such as Mr. Weller senior ducked the dissenter in) and a green painted table outside its inviting door." The landlord of the "Plumper's" is a perfect original, and by humour and racy anecdotes draws numbers of people to his ingle. From him you may hear about all the oddities and scandals of the country for ten miles round. Inside the little inn the great oak ceiling-beams scowl down upon the visitor, and warn him that this is no stucco villa with two feet concrete foundations and slipslap brickwork. Mr. Matthews has many stories of bygone days, and one which is curiously revealing as to the Arcadian vein of humour is well worth repeating:

"Why, Mus Dawkins, what ever has happened to your old dog?" said a rustic to his crony, as his lurcher trotted after him bleeding from some nasty cuts and bruises about his dewlap.

"Well, bor, it was this way you see. I was coming past the lodge gate together when all at onst I be bothered if old Lord ——'s furry-coat ship-dawg didn't roosh out at my ol' dawg, and fairly slaughter 'im. His lordship was behither the hedge an' I called him out and

tongue-lashed 'im to the proper tune of music. A man's gotter stick up for his own. . ."

"You fare to be wunnerful audacious," declared the other rustic in frank admiration. "Depend on't there's not many 'bout here would stand up and brow-beat a gen'leman with a handle to 'is name."

"Handle to 'is name. Gaw!" said Mr. Dawkins with wrathful indignation. "So's a hop-dog gotter a five fut handle! But that don't keep it from getting its nose rubbed in the dirt now and again!"

For the information of my readers who are not conversant with the implement called a "hop-dog," I may explain this instrument consists of a long piece of wood, to act as a lever, and a V shaped piece of iron with teeth cut in it attached to the end, to clasp the hop-poles, and draw them readily from the ground.

How mightily some of these rustics swear; how like the old Vikings they quaff their ale, and how joyous is their pledge, "ere's to your good health, even if it's a mile to the bottom." It is interesting to note that "one that will drink deepe, though it bee a mile to the bottome" is one of the synonyms for a man "who takes a pint otherwhile" noted by Heywood and Shakespeare. When an Essex man accidentally "drowns" his whisky with water he speaks of it as "putting the miller's eye out." The occult reason for dragging a miller into this

saying is no doubt connected with the fact that while water is the breath of life to him for the purpose of working his mill, he can easily have too much of a good thing in the way of floods. A "shant of gatter," which is the Essex shibboleth for a pot of beer, is curious, and there would be little difficulty in connecting it with Shakespeare's "shinker," meaning a tapster. A pot of beer is divided into three draughts by the rustic—"neckum," "sinkum" and "swankum." The meaning of the first two expressions are quite clear, but I have yet to learn why the "heel-tap" is called "swankum." Beer is also called "bellywengins," or belly vengeance, and recalls an old tag:

> Be sure, overnight if this dog (beer) do you bite,
> You take it henceforth for a warning,
> For vengeance sake, and your thirst to slake
> Take a hair of his tail in the morning.

When an Essex man means to convey to you that he "owns a field" he will tell you that "he owes it" or "he do owe it," and that will be enough to recall to your memory one of the most charming passages in the English language—

> No poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou owedst yesterday.

"Gal-ka-bor" may seem like the name of an oriental character from the "Arabian Nights" to those unacquainted with the rustic dialect, but it really signifies a "girl-cow-boy." Another

curiosity of the dialect is the adverbial turn given to compound epithets by the addition of "ly" as toss-pot-ly" and "stuff-gut-ly." "Er" is added to names of places to indicate residents as Coxaller (Coggeshaller).

The people of Coggeshall do not bear a very enviable character, for we are told they have always held a reputation for Bœotian foolishness and boastfulness. The expression a "Coxall job" is still used by the Essex people to denote a foolish act, and the tradition is supported by the old saying:

> Braintree for the pure,
> And Bocking for the poor,
> Cogshall for the foolish town,
> And Kelvedon for the whore.

In a Coggeshall inn I was gravely told the immortal story of Winthrop the local carrier. "Winthrop was a woundly (very great) fellow with the wenches and the ale, and could dance like a flea," said my informant to give a point to his story. "Well, one night he came in here and must have swigg'd off one pot too many, for he suddenly jumped up and looked wonnerful white, like he didn't rightly know where he was. 'Hark!' he sez. 'That's my horses and wagon galloping up the street. The whole blighted lot hev taken fright. For God's sake, you boys, come and help me chase 'em.'"

In a moment the tap room was all of a hugger-mugger, and everybody was rushing for the door and gameling about in the street. The carrier

swore he could hear his wagon in the distance, and set off after it in a real rumbustical way with all the simple Coggeshallers kicking up a shindy behind him. The only man who did not sow any gape-seed was old Gabber, the landlord of the inn; he did not fare to bother his head about it. Well, later on back came all the crowd on 'em, puffing and blowing, after running three miles, and swearing no end.

"Found the waggon, boys?" asked old Gabber.

"Hem-a-bit," sez Winthrop. "The plaguy thing hev clean vanished with dunnamany folks' boxes and parcels with it."

"Have you looked in the stable for the horses where ye put 'em?" sez Gabber, looking wunnerful cunning.

And sure enough, when the company of bar went round to stable, they found the wagon in the yard and the horses "put up" exactly where the carrier had unharnessed them a few hours previously!

Market Saffron, "where Mr. Direck explored the church and the churchyard and the parish register," is of course Saffron Walden, where the saffron crocus was once largely cultivated. But saffron is no longer grown here now and about the only remembrance of it are the saffron flowers carved in the spandrels of the aisle arch opposite the south door of the parish church. The rise of the cultivation of saffron in Essex

is a thing which is shrouded in mystery. John Vaughan writes :

" It is commonly said, and the statement is repeated by one writer after another, that it was introduced by one Sir Thomas Smith, into the neighbourhood of Walden in the time of Edward III. Old Hakluyt, writing in 1582, says, ' It is reported at Saffron Walden that a pilgrim, proposing to do good to his countrey, stole a head of Saffron, and hid the same in his Palmer's staffe, which he had made hollow before of purpose, and so he brought the root into this realme with venture of his life, for if he had bene taken, by the law of the countrey from whence it came, he had died for the fact.' It is evident from this story that even in the sixteenth century Saffron had been so long cultivated at Walden that the true history of its introduction had been lost ; and perhaps the theory of old Cole in his ' Adam in Eden,' published in 1657, may not be so far wrong when he suggested that for this plant, as for so many others, we are indebted to the Romans."

Alas ! the old order changes ! It is with feelings of genuine regret that we find no saffron plants at " Walden "—the town among the woods—especially as our old friend Gerarde tells us that " the moderate use thereof is good for the head, and maketh the sences move quicke and lively, shaketh off heavy and drowsie sleepe, and maketh a man merry."

In Camden's "Britannia" we find the following interesting passage:

"The fields all about," he says, "look very pleasant with saffron. For in the month of July every third year, when the roots have been taken up, and after twenty days put under the turf again, about the end of September they shoot forth a bluish flower, out of the midst whereof hang three yellow chives of saffron, which are gathered in the morning before sun-rise, and being taken out of the flower are dried by a gentle fire. And so wonderful is the increase, that from every acre of ground they gather eighty or an hundred pounds of wet saffron, which when it is dry, makes about twenty pounds. And what is more to be admired, that ground that hath borne saffron three years together, will bear barley very plentifully eighteen years without dunging, and then will bear saffron again."

"Walsen" is the Saxon name for the town, and in other times the word "Chipping" was prefixed to signify that it included a market. Then "Saffron" came forward as a prefix, and with the wane of this plant the town became spoken of as plain Walden.

To the south of the town lies Newport, which Mr. Reginald A. Beckett in his "Romantic Essex" says should certainly be visited for the sake of the character and distinction of the ancient houses in the village street:

"One of them, called Monk Barns, believed to have belonged to some religious fraternity, has upon its front a carved wooden group of figures which seem to represent the coronation of the Virgin. Not far off stands the Crown House (so called from a crown over the door), said to have been formerly occupied by Nell Gwynne; while the 'Coach and Horses' Inn also has associations with the reign in which she flourished."

The last time I paid a visit to Walden I alighted at the ————————, an old-fashioned rambling inn, which looks as if it had known no change since the days when coaches rolled past it to Norwich. I was diverted here by the arrival of two farmers; with them I spent the rest of the evening in cheerful converse. One of them told me how, in his childhood, the Essex dialect flourished among the older yeoman land-holders. The Essex dialect bears a close resemblance to the dialect of Suffolk, while the latter is nearly allied to the phraseology of Norfolk. I may here remark a peculiarity in the use of the word "together." Throughout the county the peasants use this word in a most perplexing and unconnected way, placing it anywhere in a sentence where it will really be meaningless. Mr. Charles G. Harper in his "Norwich Road" remarks that it "is a kind of linguistic excrescence which, like a wart or a boil, is neither useful nor beautiful." How-

ever, he tells of a very amusing conversation between the landlord of a country inn and an Essex rustic in which the use of this stupid contortion of speech is very quaintly exhibited:

He walked into the bar, and surprised to find mine host in solitary state, exclaimed, "What all alone together, bor?"

"Yes," replied the landlord, in no wise astonished at this extraordinary expression, "the missus has gone to Colchester together."

"Did my missus go with her?" asked the rustic.

"No," replied the landlord, "she went by herself."

It is a pleasure to hear the antiquated words and phrases which the countryman employs in his evening gossip at the out-of-the-way alehouse. The very kind of inn which Goldsmith has lovingly described:—

> Where greybeard mirth and smiling toil retired,
> Where village statesmen talked with looks profound
> And news much older than their ale went round.

Into such a house I remember, some years ago, being driven by a wild night of wind, rain, and pitchy darkness, on the road at White Roding, and the cheerful blaze of the wood fire with its aromatic exhalations, and the rustic group around it, as I entered, were a most welcome contrast to the illimitable and melancholy blackness without. Saddle-weary, wet and hungry as I was, I had no intention of being conducted to the best parlour of this small inn to endure

the family heirlooms in the shape of anti-macassars and photographs of "Gaffer" and "Gammer" Gumble. I always make it my rule to sit at the common board at such a humble hostel, for I have learnt through bitter experience that where there's life there's fire, or in other words the best parlour is probably damp and forlorn as the event of a fire there is an uncommon thing. The thing to do is to march into the common room and ensconce yourself in the chimney-corner, or you will be led into chill dungeon to await supper to the accompaniment of hissing sticks and most pungent blue smoke disputing a passage up the damp chimney.

One rather mournful incident remains with me regarding the inn at White Roding. A coffin was carried upstairs during the evening with a good deal of rustic hurly-bulloo, and I was surprised to notice that the shape was not familiar but ridged and gabled like the double roof of a house. I think the ridged coffin was common in former ages, and this ancient shape is supposed to resist much longer the weight of the earth above it. On the East Coast down Yarmouth way I have seen a coffin shaped like a duck-punt; the boat shape is a peculiar form which is now seldom seen.

* * * *

Most writers set their backgrounds most carelessly—a village is any old village, a country-side is a place of grass and lanes and trees—

just that and nothing more. With Wells it is different. He is not just content with labels; he sees that place, with its inevitable manners and customs, may become knit in with a man's flesh and blood; may cunningly mould and succour him.

The way in which our land and we are interfused and are part of the same thing constantly finds an echo in his work. It is a very dominant note in "Mr. Britling." In "Mr. Britling" there are many passages which show H. G. W.'s "deep irrational love" for the homely miracle of things that never change. It is the land which abides and is real. Listen to Wells defending the charges made by Mr. Van der Pant that Essex is a dull, inefficient county, with miserable roads, badly lit houses, lazy workmen, and poorly reared pigs:

"He set himself to explain to Mr. Van der Pant firstly that these things did not matter in the slightest degree, the national attention, the national interest ran in other directions; and secondly that they were, as a matter of fact and on the whole, merits slightly disguised. He produced a pleasant theory that England is really not the Englishman's field, it is his breeding place, his resting place, a place not for efficiency but good humour. If Mr. Van der Pant were to make inquiries he would find there was scarcely a home in Matching's Easy that had not sent some energetic representative out

of England to become one of the English of the world. England was the last place in which English energy was spent. These hedges, these dilatory roads were full of associations. There was a road that turned aside near Market Saffron to avoid Turk's wood; it had been called Turk's wood first in the fourteenth century after a man of that name. He quoted Chesterton's happy verses to justify these winding lanes:

> The road turned first towards the left,
> Where Perkin's quarry made the cleft;
> The path turned next towards the right,
> Because the mastiff used to bite . . . .

And again:

> And I should say they wound about
> To find the town of Roundabout,
> The merry town of Roundabout
> That makes the world go round.

If our easy-going ways hampered a hard efficiency, they did at least develop humour and humanity. Our diplomacy at any rate had not failed us . . . . . ."

Throughout "Mr. Britling" we note that the author with a half-unconscious art voices his own tender attachment for that trodden nook of Essex about home at Easton Glebe near Dunmow. It is the old things he loves; it is in celebrating them that he rises to sudden heights:

"Nobody planned the British estate system, nobody planned the British aristocratic system, nobody planned the confounded Constitution, it came about, it was like layer after layer

wrapping round an agate, but you see it came about so happily in a way, it so suited the climate and the temperament of our people and our island, it was on the whole so cosy, that our people settled down into it, you can't help settling down into it, they had already settled down by the days of Queen Anne, and Heaven knows if we shall ever really get away again."

The Rev. G. Montagu Benton, of Saffron Walden, has kindly given me some interesting information about Little Easton, which is especially devoted to Wells's most personal story, " Mr. Britling " :

" He had seen thatched and timbered cottages, and half-a-dozen inns with creaking signs. He had seen a fat vicar driving himself along a grassy lane in a governess cart drawn by a fat grey pony. It wasn't like any reality he had ever known. It was like travelling in literature."

The " fat vicar " is very possibly the former rector of Little Easton, Rev. Henry Symonds. We meet with the ample and genial vicar again as Mr. Dimple (p. 36), and there can be little doubt that this is an exact portrayal, for the mannerisms of speech are closely imitated by Wells.

" There was some amiable sparring between the worthy man and Mr. Britling about bringing Mr. Direck to church on Sunday morning. ' He's terribly Lax,' said Mr. Dimple to Mr. Direck,

smiling radiantly. 'Terribly Lax. But then nowadays Everybody *is* so Lax. And he's very Good to my Coal Club; I don't know what we should do without him. So I just admonish him. And if he doesn't go to church, well, anyhow he doesn't go anywhere else. He may be a poor churchman, but anyhow he's not a dissenter. . . .'"

The side chapel devoted to the "Mainstay" family described on p. 36 is to be seen in Little Easton church, although on inspection the real name is found to be Maynard.

"There were also mediæval brasses of parish priests, and a marble crusader and his lady of some extinguished family which had ruled Matching's Easy before the Mainstays came."

The "extinguished family" were the Bourchiers, Earls of Essex. Easton Lodge was originally built about 1550, although most of the building was destroyed by fire and rebuilt about 1845.

CHAPTER XVIII

Some Literary Landmarks

The cycle and motor car and railway are no doubt serviceable to modern ends. They enable one, where the world is distressed by stucco-faced villas and sad-faced people, to spin by more rapidly, but somehow the dust and turmoil of the engine of travel seems to kill all romance. However, the hero of " The Wheels of Chance "—Hoopdriver—rode off into Surrey on an ancient velocipede in search of spring and rose-coloured dreams and was successful up to a certain point. But he found disillusionment too, like most of us. Perhaps if Hoopdriver had left the bicycle at home, and taken to the road in the old way on foot, with staff and wallet, it would have been better for his soul. On foot he might have pressed England to his heart, a thing which is very difficult to do on a bicycle with a cramping sensation about the knees and calves. But, sad to relate, he was thinking of pressing a chance met young lady in grey to that vital organ of his body, and that is where all the mischief started. It was a dainty, willowy nymph mounted on a bicycle which caused Hoopdriver to miss :

> Taffy dancing through the fern
> To lead the Surrey spring again.

But there is one great merit in our railways, as Hilaire Belloc has pointed out—they are trenches which drain our modern marsh . . . " for you have but to avoid railways, even by five miles, and you can get more peace than would fill a nosebag. All the world is my garden since they built railways, and gave me leave to keep off them."

For my part I prefer Taffy to Wells's young lady in rationals. You are not acquainted with the fair Taffy, reader ? You must read Kipling's " Just So Stories." However, I am beating the Devil round the gooseberry bush—getting away from my subject.

It is my purpose in this chapter to wander afield in the odd corners of Surrey and Kent which have served as a background for so many of Wells's novels and stories. First we will follow in the tracks of Hoopdriver and observe some of the features of the countryside he passed through. The first landmark of the tour which is to be noted is the " Green Man " Inn on the top of Putney Hill. Here it was that the heathkeeper watched the awkward Hoopdriver fall off his machine and here in a tone of friendly and determined controversy he discussed with him the various methods of dismounting. The " Green Man " was a highwayman's house of call in the dear dead days of powder and patches and pistols. Opposite the inn is the old wooden pound for wandering cattle. It was at the

" Marquis of Granby " at Esher that Hoopdriver was surprised by a red, moist and angry middle-aged cyclist who was cursed with a contemplative disposition and an energetic temperament. It has come into my mind that the young Wells has here painted unconsciously a faithful picture of the Wells of to-day—the Wells who is subject to moods, as he has described in Mr. Britling, when he is afflicted with a sudden desire to insult his best friends. This thought was revived in my mind on reading the Rt. Hon. C. F. G. Masterman's reproof: " For all his amazing success I doubt if Mr. Wells is a happy man. And approaching a man normally companionable, hospitable, and brilliant in conversation, such a friend may suddenly find a whip struck across his face, and a series of insults and stinging sarcasms thrown at his attempts at conversation. The same course produces strange and regrettable flarings in correspondence in the daily Press."

The old church behind the " Bear Inn " at Esher contains a roomy royal pew, " like a box at the opera," as Mr. Charles G. Harper has remarked, and " the huge boots worn by the post-boy who drove the fugitive King of the French to Claremont in 1848 are kept in a glass in the hall of the ' Bear.' "

Come we now back to Hoopdriver, who has now made his way to Godalming, which any Surrey man of the soil will tell you is called

"Godliman." The streets are narrow and astonishingly uneven with granite setts, and it was here that Hoopdriver cursed the "mechanic artes" which had furnished him with "the perfectly sound, if a little old-fashioned" boneshaker, and returned to Shank's mare as a method of progression. He entered Godalming on his feet, for the road through that delightful town is beyond dispute the vilest in the world, a mere tumult of road metal, a way of peaks and precipices; and, after a successful experiment with cider at the "Woolpack," he pushed on to Milford.

Guildford has a position of singular charm on the declivity of a hill which rolls up from the eastern bank of the river Wey. The High Street climbs steeply from the Bridge over the river for a half mile in an easterly direction. Looking up the highly picturesque High Street dominated by the projecting clock (dated 1683) of the Guildhall, we are reminded that Hoopdriver "whose feeling for gradients was unnaturally exalted," watched with his heart in his mouth "a cyclist ride down it, like a fly crawling down a window-pane."

There are many wonderful things in Guildford. As, for instance, the Castle Keep, from the top of which Hoopdriver "looked down over the clustering red roofs of the town and the tower of the church, and then going to the southern side sat down and lit a Red Herring cigarette, and

stared away south over the old bramble-bearing, fern-beset ruin, at the waves of blue upland that rose, one behind another, across the Weald, to the hazy altitude of Hindhead and Butser."

A walk from Guildford of about two miles along the main road brings the pilgrim to Merrow, and those who can appreciate the extraordinary links between the soul of man and the influence of his environment should not fail to read Rudyard Kipling's story of the Neolithic man and his little daughter Taffimai who lived "cavily in a cave" on the down, and if one is prepared to take into account all the hints in the story one may I think come very near to the beaver-swamp and the spot at the Wagai river where Tegumai speared the carp-fish :

> Then beavers built in Broadstonebrook
> And made a swamp where Bramley stands ;
> And bears from there would come and look
> For Taffimai where Shamley stands.

The noise of the world does not touch Merrow Down. One might almost imagine that even the tax-gatherer does not penetrate to this wholly rural spot, and the place seems as Pagan as when "the bison used to roam on it" a thousand years ago. That is how it impressed me at any rate. I spent a week here tramping about the bridle tracks and soon began to feel quite heathenish myself. It was a peculiar luxury to feel so very lonely, and when darkness came I forgot all about Sunday and Civilisation. The next morning my collar had begun to irritate me a little, and I

laughed to myself and thought it must be the first wave of Paganism sweeping over me. But that collar had to come off and I started out breathing freely without neck ornaments of any kind, and looking, I knew full well, very disreputable. However, I consoled myself with the wisdom of Alexander Smith, who once wrote: "Civilisation is like a soldier's stock, it makes you carry your head a good deal higher, makes the angels weep a little more at your fantastic tricks, and half suffocates you the while."

I penetrated to the bar-parlour of the "Horse and Groom" Inn at Merrow, the front of which proclaims that the building was raised in 1615, and there met a botanist who had just found a flower of the Fly Orchis—a curious little purplish brown blossom astonishingly resembling a fly hanging on to a stalk. He informed me the flower was not easy to find, but that a patient search on Merrow generally turned up a specimen.

Hoopdriver missed the wonderful network of lanes lying between the Portsmouth and Epsom Roads which tend to one point around Leatherhead. But Wells's hero was engaged in the pursuit of Cupid, and you can't even keep the rogue out of a cycling tour in Surrey. Again, he might have explored the Coldharbour Road from Dorking, made the stiff ascent of Boar Hill, and after gliding through Coldharbour, run around the southern slope of Leith Hill, until a turn to the right would have taken him to

Friday Street, built of the margin of a " hammer-pond." Friday Street might almost be called a cameo of Swiss-like scenery, for the sudden and steep fir-clad hills on the north are Swiss both in imagination and actual details. In the " wild wet forest " between Friday Street and Abinger Bottom is the swampy bed of some ancient foundry-pond, a place of pilgrimage for the botanist and amateur gardener in search of aquatic flowers. Wooton House, beyond " Wotton Hatch " Inn, is not far away. Here John Evelyn was born in 1620. A little to the right of the inn stands Evelyn's church crowning a pleasing wooded mound, where he received his earliest education. He has written in his Diary, under the date of 1624, " I was not initiated into any rudiments till I was four years of age, and then one Frier taught us at the church-porch of Wotton." It is probable that an upper-room once existed above the porch which was used as a village school in those days, but there is no trace of such a chamber now. Evelyn died in London in 1796, and on his epitaph is written his final dictum on life : " All is vanity which is not honest ; there is no solid wisdom but in real piety." From the " Wotton Hatch " Inn (it was called the " Evelyn Arms " in those good old days before the fret and clangour of hurrying motor cars robbed the place of its tranquil dreams), the road runs down to the four cross-roads to the beautiful Crossways Farm,

which is a pefect specimen of an early Jacobean house with a gabled porch. The room above the porch with its weather-beaten, lichened covered colourings is very picturesque, and the roof is a marvel of Horsham slabs. This house suggested to George Meredith the title of "Diana of the Crossways."

At the crossways the road runs right to Abinger Hall and on the left descends past a "hammer-pond" to Abinger, where the pilgrim will find an old-fashioned roadside hostelry.

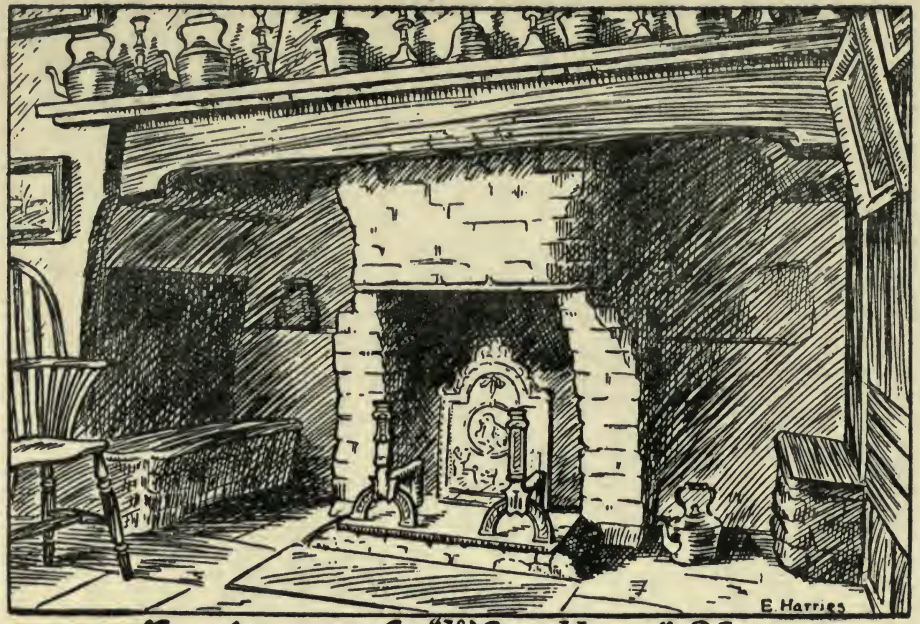
Abinger Hammer now has an air of seclusion, but it is evident by the dam-heads on the Tillingbourne at this spot that it was once a centre of the Surrey iron foundries. The Tillingbourne almost invades the road on approaching Gomshall and just leaves a slice of land which is occupied by the "Compasses," a jolly little country inn which perhaps suggested the "Potwell Inn" where Mr. Polly fished for dace under the pollard willow. Anyhow the pilgrim will find Mr. Polly's staple meal here—"Cold sirloin for choice. And nutbrown brew and wheaten bread" . . . well, if it is not of the same substance as in Mr. Polly's days the imagination must supply the XXXs to the ale and the good savour of blameless bread to the meal.

From Gomshall the pilgrim will make his way to Shere, which figures in "The Passionate Friends," and is justly accounted one of the prettiest villages in Surrey. On the left of the

road, which passes through an avenue of elms, is an ancient mill which has "clacked and ground her corn ever since Domesday Book," and on the right the Netley House estate.

The environment of Shere is unquestionably the most rich and varied in wood and slope and hollow in England. To the north are the precipitous chalk hills, garnished with hanging woods; and southwards the land rolls up over a hundred secluded hollows to the rugged crest upon which the old windmill stands like a sentinel over Ewhurst. The church of St. James has associations with Wells's "The Passionate Friends," for it was here that Stratton and Rachel More were married. There is a particular charm about this old church which must have appealed to Wells, and the west gallery, with the ancient brick stairs on the outside, may have induced him to introduce the church into his story. A fine coffin-like XIIIth century chest in the south porch deserves to be mentioned. Notice, too, the photograph of Emma Diggins, a faithful servant to this church, who died in 1907; she is portrayed with her key of office and looks like an illustration from Dickens which has come adrift. Among other striking features the pilgrim should note is the beautiful west doorway (XIIIth century); the restored brass to John Touchett, and the traces of a hermit's cell on the north side of the chancel.

The "White Horse" Inn is a XVIth century



Fireplace at the "White Horse," Shere.

building, with fine early fireplaces, and I will gladly name it to my readers who are satisfied with old-fashioned comfort and good fare. It is so comfortable that I spent a whole wet day there on one of my tramps without a tinge of regret, and I venture to draw on my diary to show that my time was very pleasant:

"Here am I sitting in the 'White Horse' at Shere. Outside there is no sun or pleasantness to make me restless or self-conscious about my laziness. Indeed, if the sun was shining it would be all the same, for I enjoy loafing. Like Mr. Dooley, I have the 'judeecal timperament,' and far down in my heart I have a great repugnance for the straight and narrow path of life's serious work . . . . well, then all is quiet and leisurely this morning. The windows show me a very dark, wet-laden street, and the steady rain falling on the gravel and paving-stones with a delightful 'swish' which comes so pleasingly to ears which are not compelled to be wading about in it. There are, of course, different kinds of rain, of different degrees of pleasantness. This is a heavy downpour, which looks as if it will continue masterfully all day, and no one but a fool would want to be out in it. Yet it entices me and I am half inclined to walk through it. I understand my debt to it, and do not think of it as a nuisance for it is doing excellent work in washing as well as stimulating growth. However, there is a soft warm rain—

'mothery' rain as they say in Surrey—which is wholly agreeable, and every man walking, riding or driving can enjoy himself out in such fine drizzle, for it makes all things happy and fragrant.

"To be out walking in the rain, of course, is the right thing for a literary tramp. Alone in the rain a man can laugh tumultuously and sing at the top of his voice without undue notice being taken of him. And here am I sitting in the 'White Horse' like any miserable millionaire who is afraid to wet his feet. It is really too mean of me. Deep within me the rain seems to awaken a longing for the wild wet primeval woods. Every time a furious gust of wind drives the flying water against the window I feel something—my soul, myself, I know not what—thrill and turn over and settle again . . .

"Therefore, I returned to the comfortable armchair by the window, to study the rain in all its marvellous moods and graces.

"Mere laziness? No, not that. The rain is a thing for lyrics, and as I sat there I wrote several canticles and sung them to the head waiter, who liked them very much, being abnormally deaf.

"The first one was a parody with a flavour of Belloc:

I swing along the Surrey lanes
And sing loud songs whene'er it rains;
The furious gust's rampageous swoop
Shall never cause my heart to stoop.
Earth-wine is good and ale also;
I dance: I sing: I sway:
Benedicamus Domino:
I take my bath that day."

Also (but I cannot go on quoting my majestic verse in a book of this kind), I imagined myself one of those supercilious literary dandies—one of the Yellow Book fellows with fawn-like eyes :—

> Open the window wide :
> Give me an amber scented cigarette :
> Bring that copy of Flaubert and fourteen
> Great fat yellow cushions,
> Then, my brain afire,
> And my eyes looking through opal-tinted clouds,
> I'll sit and listen to the mad, wild rain,
> And laugh and curse as each gust
> Suddenly twists it in upon my face ;
> Stare at faunish-eyed girl next door
> Who always wears Venetian silk stockings
> And walks with imperious step
> Like some barbarous Eastern Queen—
> Watch the gutters fill
> Until I see them seeth tumultuously
> With a thousand opium demons
> Racing, racing, racing to hell
> Down the next open grating.

Yes, the " White Horse " is that kind of house that receives a man like a friend. There is an open chimney in the smoking room with deep ingle seats, and a spacious fireplace with a XVIIth century fireback and dogs ; here beech logs send their pleasant fragrance to the flames during the long winter evenings. The walls are embellished with paintings from the brush of the landlord, Mr. R. J. Askew, who follows the recognised school of artists formed in this spot, of whom Mr. Leader is the principal figure. The sign board of the inn is a happy idea and is the work of Mr. Askew. It depicts an impossible white and woolly wild horse with a super-curly mane.

" The White Horse " Inn was the subject of a

Royal Academy picture by G. Hillyard Swinstead in 1904.

* * * *

It is on the London and Folkestone road from Ashford to Faversham, by Eastwell and Sheldwich, that we must look for most of the topographical hints which Wells throws out in "Tono-Bungay." "Bladesover" itself is not given on the map, but I think Eastwell Park may be determined upon as the old mansion that served as a model for Wells's "great house" in the novel. But the description of "Bladesover" is a composite picture; a good deal of it deriving from Up Park near Petersfield. However, here is Wells's description:

"Bladesover lies up on the Kentish Downs, eight miles perhaps from Ashborough; and its old pavilion, a little wooden parody of the temple of Vesta at Tibur, upon the hill crest behind the house, commands in theory at least a view of either sea, of the Channel southward and the Thames to the north-east. The park is the second largest in Kent, finely wooded with well-placed beeches, many elms and some sweet chestnuts, abounding in little valleys and hollows of bracken, with springs and a stream and three fine ponds and multitudes of fallow deer."

Ashford town itself is a scene in "Tono-Bungay," where it is called Ashborough, and we are told that "the distance from Chatham to Bladesover House is almost exactly seventeen

miles," which coincides with the distance between Chatham and Eastwell. The views of Eastwell Park are of exquisite beauty, and from the north-west, where the grounds rise to a considerable elevation, the eye ranges over a mass of richly-wooded slopes to the silver line of the English Channel, and beyond the felicitous valley of the Medway to Sheerness, and the broken waves of the Nore.

Aubrey relates a curious tradition of one of the Earls of Winchelsea, " who," he says, " at Eastwell in Kent, felled down a most curious grove of oaks, near his noble Seat, and gave the first Blow with his own Hands. Shortly after his Countess died in her Bed suddenly, and his eldest Son, the Lord Maidstone, was killed at Sea by a Cannon Bullet. It is a common Notion that a strange Noise proceeds from a falling Oak, so loud as to be heard at half a Mile distant, as if it were the Genius of the Oak lamenting." (Surrey, ii, 34.) To this superstition Ovid elegantly refers—

> The trembling oak with sighs of sorrow wept,
> And deadly paleness o'er its branches crept ;
> But when the band profane a wound bestow'd,
> Quick from the yawning side its life-blood flow'd :

It was to Eastwell, says a curious tradition, that a natural son of Richard III fled after the battle of Bosworth. " Sir Thomas Moyle discovered him working, in the disguise of a bricklayer, and permitted him to build himself a small hut in a field near Eastwell Place, where, it is

supposed, he died in 1550, aged 81. (There is an interesting correspondence, tending to confirm the truth of the story, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, July and August, 1767.) In the Eastwell register occurs a remarkable entry, prefaced by a sign always employed whenever any one of noble family was buried: "*Rychard Plantagenet was buryed the 22d daye of December, anno ut supra.*" A tomb in the chancel, without inscription or brasses, has been pointed out as the Plantagenet's, but it is uncertain whether he was buried in the church or churchyard. His hut was pulled down, *temp.* James II, and its site is occupied by a modern house. A spring which wells out near it is still called "Plantagenet's Well."

In mentioning "Tono-Bungay," which is Wells's most perfect literary monument, it is interesting to note that the pathetic death scene of Uncle Ponderevo at St. Jean Pierre de la Porte is a remembrance of George Gissing's death, and Wells's last visit to him.

* * * *

Wells is a Kentish man and in all his early work we obtain glimpses of the feeling he had for the "Garden of England," famed for hops, apples, cherries, cricket, fearless men, and pretty girls. The "Men of Kent" claimed, as representing the oldest Saxon Kingdom, to lead the van in battle, and since the Norman invasion it has been their boast that they forced the Conqueror, at

the point of the sword, to acknowledge all their valued customs, and their right to the proud motto, *Invicta.* So Wordsworth called them the "Vanguard of Liberty," and it seems appropriate that Wells, who has always flaunted his liberty so defiantly and defended it so pugnaciously, should have been reared on Kentish soil. There is an unforgettable and most delicately fashioned picture of Aldington Knoll beneath a rising moon in "Mr. Skelmersdale in Fairyland," and we feel that he must have watched such scenes until they had become part of his life.

"Jupiter was great and splendid above the moon, and in the north and north-west the sky was green and vividly bright over the sunken sun. The Knoll stands out bare and bleak under the sky, but surrounded at a little distance by dark thickets, and as I went up towards it there was a mighty starting and scampering of ghostly or quite invisible rabbits. Just over the crown of the Knoll, but nowhere else, was a multitudinous thin trumpeting of midges. The Knoll is, I believe, an artificial mound, the tumulus of some great pre-historic chieftain, and surely no man ever chose a more spacious prospect for a sepulchre. Eastward one sees along the hills to Hythe, and thence across the Channel to where, thirty miles and more, perhaps, away, the great white lights by Gris Nez and Boulogne wink and pass and shine. Westward lies the whole tumbled valley of the Weald, visible as

far as Hindhead and Leith Hill, and the valley of the Stour opens the Downs in the north to interminable hills beyond Wye. All Romney Marsh lies southward at one's feet, Dymchurch and Romney and Lydd, Hastings and its hill are in the middle distance, and the hills multiply vaguely far beyond where Eastbourne rolls up to Beachy Head."

It would be easy to multiply instances illustrating the value of place in Wells's novels. It was the spirit of place in the soul of the inimitable Kipps which saved him from the futility of a marriage with the snobbish Helen Walsingham and led him back to the charming little housemaid, Ann Pornick:

"Then suddenly, with extraordinary distinctness, his heart cried out for Ann, and he saw her as he had seen her at New Romney, sitting amidst the yellow sea-poppies with the sunlight on her face. His heart called out for her in the darkness as one calls for rescue. He knew, as though he had known it always, that he loved Helen no more." For Kipps' life and the meaning of life became interwoven with place and the meaning of place. His visit to New Romney to break the news of his engagement to his Uncle and Aunt was the thing which caused him to shirk the match with Helen. He returned to the scenes of his childhood with eyes sharpened by exile and found that fourth dimension which always tugs at the heart of the native. "He had been thinking

curious things ; whether, after all, the atmosphere of New Romney and the Marsh had not some difference, some faint impalpable quality that was missing in the great and fashionable world of Folkestone behind there on the hill. Here there was a homeliness, a familiarity. He had noted as he passed that old Mr. Cliffordown's gate had been mended with a fresh piece of string. In Folkestone he didn't take notice, and he didn't care if they built three hundred houses."

Wells used the spirit of place with vehement effect in the first chapters of " The War in the Air." The description of the small greengrocer's shop at Bun Hill suggests Bromley and the author's birth-place, and as a matter of fact it is so accurate that the reader may be readily guided to the actual house, which is still standing in the High Street.

Home, atmosphere, place, these are great words —they stand for thoughts which are deeply interfused in us, and they are inseparable from a sense sublime and an immeasurable influence :—

> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

THE END

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